

THIS BOOK MUST BE RETURNED ON
OR BEFORE THE DATE LAST
SP.

MALTA AND ME



THE AUTHOR

MALTA AND ME

BY

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TO MY LITTLE SON DAVID,
WHO WAS BORN IN VALLETTA,
MALTA, MAY 24TH, 1922.

MAHARANA BHUPAL
COLLEGE,
UDAIPUR.

Class No.....

Book No

P R E F A C E

IF the title of this book has an egotistical sound in some ears, the author can only say that it has in his, too, and that he admits and regrets it. Still, he could not call the work just plain 'Malta', because it does not profess to be an exhaustive account of the island and its institutions, but rather a semi-autobiographical record of three years spent there in perhaps rather peculiar circumstances. People who know the island and its inhabitants may find it interesting to compare their impressions with the author's; people who do not know the island may yet care for the book as a document of human experience.

What does Malta matter? What indeed? It doesn't much, I freely own, where the reading public of Great Britain is concerned. A book on such a subject certainly cannot 'make quick-coming death a little thing', or serve perhaps any of the major needs of humanity.

Still, Malta exists—it is part of our 'far-flung' Empire on which the sun never sets. It is an island and a people in some respects unique, and many of the larger problems of imperial policy may be usefully studied there in little.

Above all, Malta is a banquet of that subtle incongruity which is the essence of humour.

If a few readers will overcome their objection to books which are not novels, and a reviewer here and there his to any book at all, the author thinks he can promise that, for the little time it takes to read what it took him three years to live, they will not be too much bored.

E. S.

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CHAPTER I

HORS D'ŒUVRES VARIEES

ONE question was so often put to me during my three years in Malta, that I feel I had better begin this account of those years by answering it.

“Why did you ever come to Malta?” That was the question: put, with a genuinely puzzled air, *not* (I need hardly say) by Maltese, but by our English acquaintance upon the island. As for the Maltese, with them the wonder rather is, not that people come to the island, but that, after experiencing its bliss, they should ever care to go away again.

This question can now be answered with a frankness not possible at the time. And the answer is an extremely simple one, like all the best answers. I went to Malta for no other reason than that I was offered a job there, at a time when there was no competition for my services in less out-of-the-way parts of the world. It all dates back to the year 1920, when the uncertainty of livelihood was hardly less acute for many of us, than the uncertainty of life had been in the years immediately preceding. I went to Malta in the first instance, and I stayed there for close upon three years simply because I had no alternative. People have been known, I believe, to do even stranger things for no better reason.

I can hardly make this absence of alternative

quite plain, without some appearance of wishing to 'buttonhole' the reader; than which nothing is in worse literary taste. This, however, is frankly by way of being a personal narrative, and therefore I may perhaps state without offence that, in the year 1920, I was endeavouring to subsist upon journalism, of the type known as 'free-lance', and upon a (temporary) engagement as lecturer in English Literature (that step-child of English culture) at a provincial university college. Not much stability there, as one sees; little enough peace! There is more *lance* than *freedom* for the heart of this kind of journalist, as a rule; and I was receiving from the college, in full discharge of all liability towards me and my English Literature, precisely fifty pounds per term of ten weeks. The engagement was by the term, so as to avoid responsibility for my vacations; during which I was academically non-existent—except in the particular of term-papers. It is only fair to the college, however, to stress the fact that I was a mere stopgap, carrying on at my own risk over an interim; but, as various human necessities are on the permanent, pensionable staff of my being, I of course could not hope to be rid of them when the college was rid of me. What is more, the college being a 'mixed' one, I had recently put a sharp edge on life by falling in love with a student. I did this, I freely admit, again entirely at my own risk, and well knowing that it was highly unbecoming in a 'temporary' to seek to establish permanent rights in any item of college property. But, as an Oxford verse of my day put it:—

"The English School is, credit me,
A matrimonial agency—"

and, temporary as was my engagement at the college, it was yet long enough to give rise to another 'engagement', only temporary in the sense that it was so soon exchanged for something much, much better.

It is instructive to add, that, at exactly the same time as all this, my income-tax returns were criticised at local headquarters as "requiring elucidation", and I was requested to drop in at my early convenience upon the surveyor. I did so. With the "kindly light" of a perfect candour I "led" the clerk amid the "encircling gloom" of my entries upon the form, and when the "angel-faces" of conviction smiled upon him at length, he gave me a quizzical glance through his glasses. He *surveyed* me—as if, indeed, I were something of a phenomenon. I have often wondered, since, what that glance really signified; whether human sympathy or mere scientific interest? I heard from him again soon after my arrival in Malta, and took, I remember, even at that crisis, a certain pleasure in replying that my income, if small, was now at least all my own. No part of it had to go to America in payment of war-debts, or to Palestine in prosecution of peace-ramps, or into the pockets of them that live upon the dole; on the contrary, I had myself now become, as Shelley said of his Adonais, "a portion of that loveliness which once he made more lovely." In other words, I was now a charge upon those very taxes which erst I helped to pay. *L'Empire — c'est la paix!*

All this is but so much side-light on my reasons for accepting the exile of Malta.

CHAPTER II

DILLY, DILLY, DILLY

THE first word I ever had about Malta, beyond perhaps a schoolroom reference long ago to its geographical situation, came to me, early in the year 1920, in the form of a letter from the Colonial Office. I was not in the habit of corresponding with this department, and the appearance of the official-looking missive beside my unassuming breakfast-plate considerably surprised me. I remember I turned it over once or twice, with some bewilderment, before I opened it. Its contents, signed by the Under Secretary of State, were to effect that, the "Chair of English Literature" at the University of Malta having recently fallen vacant, inquiry at Oxford had resulted in the suggestion of my name for the appointment.

Malta ! An old refrain rang in my ears—something about "oranges, monkeys, and nothing but sand"; but I could not for the life of me remember whether Malta was remarkable for all three, or two, or only one; and in any case none of the specifications appealed to me at all. Very certainly I had not known that the island boasted a university, but I should have pictured it as a gaunt rock, à la Gibraltar, stuck out of the mid-most Mediterranean, and inhabited, to what sparse extent it might be inhabited at all, by a race of goatherds, by blood a squalid heel-tap of adjacent

Sicily. (Curiously enough, this last particular is exactly what some Maltese patriots make themselves out to be! But I was ignorant of this, as of very much else, at the time.)

‘Professor!’. It is a big word at all times. But at no time, perhaps, is it bigger and bonnier than when first breathed in the ear of a temporary lecturer. Even the tightest fit of a ‘chair’ is surely an improvement on a foot-stool—and a foot-stool, moreover, liable at any moment to be jerked from under one. There are chairs and chairs, of course: easy-chairs, dental-chairs—even electric-chairs! But it did not occur to me that this chair so opportunely offered my weariness would be anything but the ‘easy’ variety. Indeed, it is characteristic of the sanguine spirit of man that the letter was hardly read to an end, before I was hard at it constructing an ideal and idiotic picture of myself lounging in the most luxurious of *fauteuils*, in the midst of an earthly paradise of oranges, monkeys, and—well, perhaps *rather* too much sand.

My conception of a university institution was founded at that time upon the college where I was temporarily assisting; for I did not get the length of supposing that Oxford had counterparts scattered about the globe. Malta University, then, according to my view of it, was to be a young but thriving community of study, full of life and experiment, eager and imitative, and fostering by the excellence of its amenities, both among staff and students, a strongly social side. The drawbacks, I supposed on the same crazy analogy, would be a certain crudeness now and then, a narrowness here and there, and the usual propensity (common to youthful institutions of the

kind) to wear *two* caps and *two* gowns *ad majorem sui gloriam*. How I came to be such a fool as to imagine in this manner, I simply cannot think ; unless the plea be admitted that man *must* flatter himself with pleasing prospects and will be apt to base visions of the future on what has afforded pleasure in the past. He might be better advised, no doubt ; but—would he be man ? And would the work of our empires get done ? I greatly doubt. Anyhow, such was the picture I presented to myself of the enlightened institution which seemed willing to confer upon me the grandiloquent prefix of 'professor' : we shall see shortly how it squared with the facts.

In one particular, at any rate, I was not deceived. Malta abounds in the most cautionary degrees. If everyone wore the hood, or hoods, to which he is entitled, Valletta would be a gay city indeed. The Maltese professional classes are 'doctors' to a man, and all the more eminent among them are either professors or examiners at what is referred to as "our Alma Mater"—meaning the University. Huge punctilio is observed (especially in respect of political opponents) in rendering to everybody his due quota of initial letters, with result that a single name sometimes occupies a whole line of type. It is a form of politeness, no doubt ; but on a small island where everybody is something, and most people are several things, and where, moreover, naval and military personages of ultra-alphabetical distinction abound, it is a form which grows very exhausting : one takes to making up little formulas, in the semi-delirium of hot Sirocco nights when sleep is out of the question,—as, for instance, 'Major-General the Hon. Sir Perkin Warbeck Jones, Bart., A.B.C.,

D.E.F., G.H.I.J., K.L.M., N.O.'—or—' The Hon. Rev. Dr. Canon Prof. Salvatore Birzebugeja, P.Q.R.S., T.U.V., W.X.Y.Z.' It becomes quite an obsession—like constructing cross-word puzzles.

To return, however, to the letter from the Under Secretary of State It was a pleasantly-worded communication, personal in tone, and giving one the illusion of being an object of real interest to the writer. It referred diffidently and vaguely to the salary offered, which, so said the letter in effect, was at present nothing to write home about, but might, with a little adjustment, be made to furnish matter for a fairly effective postcard. I might, my correspondent suggested, find it interesting to influence the rising generation of Maltese "in the right direction". Did I by any chance know any Italian? (I did not)—an undoubted asset in that pendent of the Italian peninsula. Finally, would I at all care to interview the writer on the subject here broached? If so, he would have pleasure in making the arrangement. He was, Mine Very Truly.

Of this last suggestion I took advantage a week later; having been in the meantime to Oxford for advice. None of my friends at Oxford knew anything of Malta, but all equally urged me to go. It was therefore with a mind pretty well made up that I presented myself at the Colonial Office to be interviewed.

I am familiar with the Colonial Office, having friends in that dank and dismal building; but I soon found that it is one thing to see a friend, another to penetrate to the Acting Secretary of State. On first proffering my business at the door in Downing Street, there was alarm among the messengers—and several excursions; little groups

of them gathered, talking in excited undertones, and glancing from time to time at me. But at length it was ascertained that I genuinely had an appointment; whereupon I was beckoned awfully upstairs and incarcerated during His Majesty's pleasure in the largest and dreariest waiting-room I had ever seen. It dated, in point of furniture and decoration, from the palmiest days of Queen Victoria, and never, while I live, can I forget the specimens of the then infant art of photography—illustrating the sun never setting on choice panoramas of Empire—wherewith that dreadful chamber was rendered still more dire. If that room does not warn people off colonial appointments, then nothing ever will.

My reactions to this room were sharpened by a feverish cold which I had on me at the time, and exasperated by the fact that, as time wore on, it seemed less and less likely I should ever get out. I was shut up there certainly nearer two hours than one. Every now and then the door would half-open, and the suave voice of a private secretary would assure me that, though apparently dead, I was not forgotten. One voice sounded oftener than the others, and it was the owner who eventually summoned me to arise. But the summons got me no further than the ante-chamber of Greatness, where for yet another hour I sat by the fire in paroxysms of catarrh and listened to the secretaries conversing waggishly with unknown persons on the telephone.

I shall say nothing more about the interview, which did ultimately take place, than that I was not really a scrap wiser after it than before. Even at the time, with Official Greatness looking me in the face, I was deliriously reminded of Max's

cartoon of Tennyson reading his poems to Queen Victoria : the room was so vast, and ourselves so small in one corner of it. The Great Man was most affable, and I did contrive to gather from him in an evasive way that there was at present no other candidate for the job but myself ; which, as throwing light on the estimation in which it was held, gave me more qualms than satisfaction. But, under cross-examination about Malta, the Acting Secretary of State most signally failed to act. What sort of a place was Malta ? Oh, most interesting, surely—delightful situation—the blue Mediterranean—et cetera ! What was the University like ? Well, on that head he had not, in point of fact, much information ; it—held classes, granted degrees, and—so forth ! He was most agreeable, but I think a little afraid of catching my appalling cold The interview was not a long one. When it ended, however, my name was down to go out to Malta forthwith for consideration.

From that hour onward my warfare was not with principalities and powers, but with the members of the Malta, etc., department at the Colonial Office : a small group of men possessing much social charm and a fund of information on all subjects but one—the subject of Malta. It appeared that Malta was on the point of achieving self-government, and the department was preparing, with a sigh of relief, to wash its hands of all further responsibility. My own appointment was probably one of the last boons conferred upon the island by the Colonial Office, and a pretty peck of troubles this divided jurisdiction was to let me in for. My official life was to be that of a tennis-ball : the Malta Government suavely

serving me to the C.O., and the C.O. viciously swiping me back to the Malta Government. Abroad, I was referred home ; at home, abroad. . . . Though latterly there was more than a hint of wishing I might go even further and to the hottest of all climates. How often, O my soul, have I waited in that unspeakable catacomb of a Colonial Office corridor, while the papers relating to me were dug out of some deep pit ! Then, being admitted to conclave with the Junior, I would find him turning over the pages with a perfunctory finger, and hear him saying—“ I’m afraid there’s nothing I can do for you, but would you like to see Quidnunc ? ” Quidnunc usually did not at all want to see me, and showed it with deep corrugations of brow. Then, in Malta, the Governor would say “ Put it all in writing ” ; and the Minister would beg me to leave it to him and put nothing in writing And so it all went on.

I am not blaming anybody, or even making a complaint ; my job, as I well know, was an imperial anomaly, which nobody had bothered to think out. I simply record these facts in the mood of one who might say of a summer holiday, “ It rained the whole time.” Governments, having no soul to save, need not trouble to have compunction. My experience may or may not be peculiar, but, such as it is, it has convinced me that Dickens did not exaggerate his account of the Circumlocution Office. As the ‘ Young Barnacle ’ said, “ You mustn’t come here saying you want to know, you know ! ”

That is the eternal Government Office all over —the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

CHAPTER III

“ TICKETS, PLEASE !”

COMPETENT authority in Malta vindicated its independence by being in no hurry to appoint me, and the actual “These Presents” or Letter of formal appointment was not in my hands until two months later, in April. It was a lengthy document, with clauses and sub-clauses (1), (2), and (3), directed to be sent me by the Secretary of State, and signed on his behalf, together with enclosure of the Colonial Regulations, a sort of pentateuch of imperial service. It could not but appear from all this that I was to regard myself as a civil servant under the Crown, must go before a medical referee, observe all rules and regulations binding such officers, and generally involve myself in all the tedious business of government. All this in order to teach English in Malta ! It was a facer.

Touching upon details, the Letter suggested as a suitable season for my arrival in Malta, the beginning of August (1920); giving as reason for this proposal the “preparation of syllabi” for the forthcoming academic session to open in October. Being, however, privately warned that August was one of the hottest and beastliest months on the island, and having, moreover, personal fish of my own to fry in the summer, I criticised this proposal; suggesting instead the beginning of September. The alternative was

graciously conceded (after solemn conference with the island), and I was further directed to put myself in touch with the Crown Agent "relative to a passage to Malta at the beginning of September".

It is worthy of remark that the "preparation of syllabi", for which I was to have endured a whole extra month of intolerable heat, occupied in the event precisely one half hour of time.

Since I felt some doubt as to successfully passing the doctor—who, being implicated in the genial insanity of government, might not, I thought, be able to distinguish between the physique required for an African mounted policemen and that for a professor of literature in Malta,—I took the precaution of pulling a string or two before submitting my anatomy to his inspection. He proved however kindly in the extreme, begging me to regard him as one called in, not in the interests of government only, but in *my* interests. He was not, it appeared, scientifically acquainted with the climate of Malta (which seemed unfortunate!), nor was he a specialist in the effects of climate upon the human organism; but he passed me all right—though not, I prefer now to believe, without some scruples. Very thin people, already sadly under-weight, are not perhaps the best subjects for a climate which, during five months of the year, is one long Turkish bath.

And at this point I may aptly enter upon a very interesting, not to say remarkable branch, of the subject: to wit, that by no possible manner of means could my best endeavours contrive to collect one iota of reliable information concerning one single feature of the island of Malta, from anybody or anything, before I went there. Nothing,

absolutely nothing, was to be known. The Colonial Office had nothing to say, the Crown Agent was indifferent, the doctor did not know, books were brief and oracular; even Cook, in his central office at Ludgate Circus, for once proved unresponsive. Nobody whom I consulted, nothing to which I referred, had anything more valuable to offer than perhaps a little facetiousness about fleas or a little pious and picturesque vapouring about the 'azure Mediterranean' and the 'faith' of the Maltese peasantry. But heaven knows if it was faith I cared about just then, or the blueness of the sea!

I had been directed to get into touch with the 'Crown Agent', and upon this romantic-sounding person I now accordingly waited ('waited' is good!); finding that his name was legion, in respect of the clerks he employed, and that he flourished on the Embankment, in a building reminding one of Cook's bureau in Paris or Cox's bank on a larger scale. His premises, again like Cook and Cox, were full to overflowing; applicants waiting three deep at most of the counters. A commissionnaire, to whom I confided my business, indicated a counter where the congestion was *six* deep! Gracious! I thought, what a crowd for Malta! Can they all be professors?

I found however that this counter was merely a sort of clearing-house for the building; applicants were kept waiting there until a breathless clerk could snatch a moment to direct them elsewhere. An almost haggard look came over the clerk's face when I mentioned Malta, he made a gesture of despair; and I set off upon a series of Sinbad voyages, wandering 'lonely as a cloud' from counter to counter, uttering my talismanic formula

wherever I paused, but only to be impatiently waved away, with some mumbled reference to Northern Nigeria or the Gold Coast. I began to think it might save time if I applied for a passage to one of these places, in the hope of trekking across country and ultimately arriving at my professorial 'chair' by way of Barbary or *Italia in Libya*. Malta, plainly, was not a word to conjure with in this ante-chamber of the Empire's wonders.

But if baffled, I was by no means bored. Everywhere a new and hitherto unsuspected side of life opened before me. Could it be that all the thousands thronging this great building were really going out, at government expense, to colonial appointments? Could all that loud buzz of talk be indeed nothing but eager interrogation as to the means of getting out of England—not, as at Cook's, to the Riviera and Swiss fairylands, but to sodden swamps and sun-baked solitudes of Africa, there to consort, not with millionaires and members of parliament, but with mosquitoes, tsetse-flies, and crocodiles? There was one man I noticed in particular Lord, what a figure of irony and pathos! a large, gaunt, ugly, knuckly man, with a huge Adam's Apple which worked convulsively, and a ragged moustache which he sucked in nervously when not speaking. He was an ex-soldier, obviously—and I should say a pretty badly damaged one; but his business at that counter was to fix up a job for himself in one of the worst-sounding hells of Africa. It was like listening to a man clamouring for a passage to the next world. I was fascinated—and so, I think, was the clerk; for he kept glancing at the applicant, and hesitated; thereby drawing forth another flood of hoarse, heart-rending

eloquence. Stronger than he looked (the man said he was), sober habits, able to do this and that, some previous experience ; but he was too old, poor fellow, to be taking such chances—and too thoroughly smashed up ; his 'bit' in the service of insatiable empire was too plainly done. But I suppose he couldn't find a job, couldn't find a house, couldn't find anything ; so he was going to Africa, to find (most likely) a grave. I felt tired as I turned away to continue my own search—tired of empire, of official levity and lies, of the infernal cruelty of the whole damned machine.

Soon after this I collapsed in an exhausted state outside the door of the uttermost room on the topmost storey ; which proved, however, to be the veritable lurking-place of the 'competent' official. I was helped into the room and propped up on a chair opposite this pundit. Malta, he told me bluntly, was hardly more accessible than the moon ! No steamship company would book anywhere short of India or China ! I should probably have to go to Syracuse, through disorganised France and bolshevising Italy—and lucky to find a trawler even there ! Luggage, he had better warn me, was always stolen in Italy ! Indeed, in the communist regions of that country, first-class carriages were often fired into ! *Toujours la politesse !* Still, he would do what he could for me End of August, didn't I say ? Name and address, anyhow Just possible he might be able to squeeze me in on a transport, either from Tilbury or Marseilles I might rely on him to do the best he could, and let me know Sorry I'd had such a hunt round to find him Good afternoon.

I left him: my visions of stately P. & O. SS. passages distinctly in eclipse. But I may say that he proved better than his word, and fixed me up in the end not so badly by transport from Marseilles. I gave him a good deal of trouble, for I went and got married unexpectedly just a fortnight before leaving England, and he had all the fuss of securing an extra passage. The fact that he managed this, not merely without grumbles, but with congratulations, leads me to suppose that he himself was engaged. I hope he is long since happily married and doing well.

CHAPTER IV

THAT 'FAR-FLUNG' FEELING

GOING abroad on holiday is one of the most delightful things in life, but not so going abroad to live. The latter, when it comes to the point, is a most melancholy experience: more especially if your destination be some part of our 'far-flung' empire. I do not know why the Empire should seem so vulgar, but somehow it does; and there is a bitter flavour in leaving home not of choice but of necessity. I once heard of a small boy who would not eat his porridge, and his mother told him to give it to the cat; but the cat declined it, after a sniff or two, so the boy was bidden to "put it down on't hearth, it'd do for his feyther!" I am not sure if it is the father or the porridge one feels like on leaving home perforce, but the attitude towards either will illustrate the point. Quite wrong, this feeling, no doubt: one should be proud of influencing any young generation "in the right direction". But when one is by no means sure which *is* the right direction, somehow the prospect fails to please. What with my tickets purchased for me by the Crown Agent, and my signed voucher for presentation on board ship, I felt like a fully stamped letter which doesn't want to be posted. Yet I have come to think it no bad part of an Englishman's education that he should be pushed off, as I was, by economic

pressure, into making trial of the Empire we talk so much about. Provided he does it when he is young, in all likelihood he will survive ; and he will talk and think less nonsense upon some subjects all his life after. After all, the Empire is a fact ; and there is no way of realising what it amounts to except the painful one of going and seeing.

I am almost passionately fond of France, and some of the pleasantest days of my life have been spent in Paris ; but on this occasion I remember the Gare de Lyon (that gateway to so many parades) as nothing but a sordid screen-version of Dante's Inferno. Engines squealed and shrieked like souls impaled on red-hot spikes, and the whole population of Paris appeared to be leaving for Lyon on urgent private business. Our own paternal government, which was responsible for arrangements, had neglected to secure us seats, or warn us that they must be secured, by the fast train for Marseilles ; and the porter to whom we sketched our itinerary and time table, laughed 'ha-ha' like the war-horse in the Psalms, and prayed us with a gesture but only to regard the train—which indeed could hardly be seen for the *monde* which swarmed over it, like bees on a bough ! It was, in fact, only by the superhuman efforts of a Cook's interpreter that we got off several hours later by a train which took seventeen hours to get to Marseilles, and had no restaurant-car !

It took the full seventeen hours !

We arrived in Marseilles late the following afternoon, to find the place sweltering in heat, and an E.T.C. friend of mine on the platform to receive us. Though this friend had served for

five years in Malta at one time, our united pumping failed to get anything out of him beyond that "it wasn't such a bad sort of place, and anyhow we were in for it!" He took us however to his hotel, which he guaranteed as "cheap and clean". It was cheap, but clean (apparently) only in parts: of which parts our bed was not one! We had occupied it for but a few minutes when loathly things resembling black threepenny-bits began to debouch in force from under the pillows, too obviously with designs upon us. We got out before they had achieved their designs, I am happy to say; but there we were—without a bed to sleep in! And when we tried to sleep on chairs the mosquitoes, whose combined horns sounded like a saxophone, made pasturage of our flesh. What a night! In the morning we were bitten to pieces, disfigured about face and neck, and braceletted and ankleted with agony. It was our third successive night of not sleeping; we rushed about the place in a wild state, and were only pacified by learning from Cook's in the Cannebière that the transport would sail at once.

On arrival at the dock, I at once sought the purser, with a view to establishing my identity. I had no experience of boarding a steamer with nothing more convincing to show for it than an official scrap of paper, scrawled over by an obscure and illegible clerk, instructing me to 'proceed to Malta'. I feared the purser might not be impressed—and indeed, when I beheld him seated in his cabin, my heart sank. He was, I think, quite the most overpowering person I ever ran up against: six foot odd in height, broad in proportion, and with a massive face expressing as much ordinary human emotion as a brick wall.

But while with an ineffable condescension he read my letter, I looking down over his shoulder could not but read one of his on the desk before him, from the writing of which he had magnificently desisted when I made my deprecating entry. It consisted (as yet) of but one word "Sweetness."

Who "Sweetness" was, I do not know—shall never know, as her adorer has faded out of my life, leaving it how much a lessened thing! She was not on board, and the purser seemed to console himself pretty tolerably for her absence. He proved to be quite as sublime as he looked. He used to appear at dinner upon the voyage in a little white mess-jacket which enhanced the effect of his proportions, and afterwards, on the covered deck, in the soft radiance of coloured lanterns suspended, he would *stand* rather than dance. . . . Oh, but words fail me! like a frozen moment of Hellene art at its apex, with the prettiest woman on board clasped, as it were by divine right, in his arms, while by sheer force of personality he hypnotised all who watched into the belief that he was the best performer of all that company. Lithe subalterns with gauzy armfuls of partner, pompous majors manœuvring maturer charms, all might slide and slither, push and puff and pull, with more or less skill; but the purser in his little white mess-jacket stood, as it were rooted, as it were in a beautiful world of his own, caring like Gallio for 'none of these things', conceding to the music but the merest eurhythmic sway, yet the cynosure of all eyes, out-topping the rest as Eddy-stone out-tops the surge.

Our cabin, when we reached it, proved to be one of the least hygienic on board; deep-down in

the bowels of the ship, without a port hole, and furnished with an electric fan which wouldn't work. Going thence into the saloon, we ascertained that dinner was at six and seven, but that *our* dinner would be at six, inasmuch as all the covers at the more civilised hour were already booked up. A highly desirable seat, near a port-hole, and commanding the whole length of the saloon, displayed the legend "Reserved for Purser" in large characters upon it! Going from the saloon on deck, we found all the available chairs duly carded and appropriated, and even the cushioned fixtures opposite the saloon-stairs in the jealous possession of two Egyptian gentlemen, who, having neglected or failed to secure berths, were proposing to sleep there. As we had just been informed that the captain intended to economise in coal, and not reach Malta until the Friday (it was now Monday), this state of things was upsetting.

There remains but one thing to be told, and the tale of embarkation is complete. It is not an important point, and I only note it because I remember it so strangely well. That evening, after our all too early dinner, as we strolled the deck in the gathering dusk, reflecting uneasily enough, God knows, that there was nothing now but sea between us and an unknown future, there came through the dreary dock-sheds on to the cumbered quay beside the vessel, a woman (a *Marseillaise*) with a guitar, and three wild children with tambourines who sang. There is no describing the effect of that sudden tuning up, there in the twilight hush, while the mind ran broodingly on things as yet untried beyond an uncrossed sea. What is the power of music? That even this

—these tambourines, and old, flat strings, with the skirl of untrained voices—should somehow quell the heart and come with strange quiverings to penetralia of the spirit? So that the sea seemed suddenly a foe, the veiled earth a callous onlooker, the bright stars each a taunt, and the sky an unanswered question.

CHAPTER V

TRANSPORTATION—IN TWO SENSES!

After sleeping in that cabin for four torrid Mediterranean nights, I think I understand something of the feelings of a miner on emerging from his shaft into upper air. But as compensation, which is said to be a law of life, we had the best steward on board: a man with one of those whole-hearted and frequent smiles which really do make the world a better place.

Going on deck the first morning, we found the sun up in a cloudless sky, the sea a true Mediterranean blue, Marseilles a smear of fading colour on the skirts of vanishing mountains, and the ship proceeding at quarter-speed (it did this all the way) over a Gulf which on this occasion was anything but Lion-like. At breakfast word was passed round that no less an authority than the captain predicted a perfect voyage all the way; and our steward told us later that we were lucky, since the ship we were on, in anything of a sea, stood on her nose and spun on her tail, and did everything possible for a ship to do—except get along!

The company on board was a microcosm of imperial service; soldiers predominating, and the wives of soldiers going out to join or rejoin their husbands in Malta or Egypt: some having children with them. There was an odd naval officer or so, going out to relieve someone else on the

Mediterranean station. Civilians of all sorts there were, some with their family; governmental, commercial, and members of private companies, such as the Eastern Telegraph.

Another sort of imperialism was represented by four nuns, two English and two French, belonging to different orders; of whom one, an English woman, was perhaps the most talkative person on board (which is saying much!), with a lifetime of travel behind her. All four were proceeding to Egypt.

'Also rans' included an assortment of Egyptians, professional or commercial by appearance, furtive and self-effacing, except for jewellery, in which respect they blazed with Hebrew lustre. A group of stout, animated, lemon-yellow persons, male and female, proved at length to be Portuguese; but what they were officially doing on a British government transport, I do not know—unofficially, they never ceased to play bridge. Finally there were two pronouncedly 'Amer'can' young men, from whom, owing to propinquity at table, we learned that they were going out to Syria, there to teach at some American mission-settlement. Of these two, one everlastingly played chess in the smoking-room; while the other, a simple, engaging creature, wandered about in a lost manner, attaching himself to the faintest adumbration of a friendly smile, and pouring out guileless confidences in a rich twang.

No one with any experience will need to be told what immediately happened. Before the first day was half over, the whole company on board had sorted itself into cliques; birds of a feather flocking together, and thereafter looking superciliously at other fowl. The 'Service' group was

naturally *the* group, and to it the ship's officers attached themselves in their hours of ease: except the captain, who, when not on the bridge, was often in conversation with the nuns. This prevailing group had captured the seven o'clock dinner, for which it 'changed' while the lesser groups were at their nursery-dinner at six; and it emerged at eight or thereabouts, accompanied by the purser, to take (somehow) undisputed possession of the covered deck to leeward, where it danced and flirted and generally disported itself. It never mixed, as did the other groups more or less, but turned the famous 'blind eye', Nelson's supreme gift to his countrymen, upon signals fluttering from adjacent mast-heads. Here and there, perhaps, where youth triumphed over clique, it had a furtive 'glad eye' for certain female members of other groups. God bless the club-habits of us English! They are very beautiful.

Now as the 'Services'—by which one intends Navy, Army and Air Force—make up quite nine-tenths of the English society in Malta, and as they behave there exactly as I have described on board, it may be imagined how lonely and difficult a time such anomalies as ourselves were likely to have. Some people resent the self-sufficient and exclusive attitude of the Services, but personally I am convinced no deliberate slight is ever intended, and that what looks like snobbishness is really the rather pathetic result of an enjoined and studied narrowness, natural timidity, and intense preoccupation. Of course, there *are* Service snobs But what is this but to say that there are weak-minded people in every walk of life?

What, to my thinking, goes far to account for the social attitude of the Services is their possession in common of a vast 'shop' talk, interesting—and indeed intelligible—to none but themselves, but to them all-absorbing. University staffs in provincial towns are arraigned in precisely the same way, and for no other reason, by the townspeople. It is not that the Services are particularly snobbish—for even they, with their often limited sense of humour, must see the absurdity of that as they look round upon their world to-day; but they have for the most part no knowledge of, and therefore no interest in, anything outside their own profession. Add to this that, going everywhere among considerable numbers of their own kind, they are never forced, as most of us are at some time, to *develop* outside interests, as a very condition of social intercourse at all.

An apt enough illustration of precisely what never happens to the average Service man is afforded by my own three years in Malta. In that medium there was none,—no, not one—of kindred feather to myself; I was unique, *sui generis*; with result that, if my social faculties were not to atrophy through disuse, I was absolutely obliged to constrain an interest in subjects and points of view quite alien to my ordinary trend of mind. But this is a salutary discipline which the Services, with all their insistence on discipline, seldom undergo: on the rare occasions when they do undergo it—as for instance when an engineer-officer is detached to watch the construction of a battle-ship, in Glasgow or elsewhere—they are soon forced out of their groove, as children may sometimes be cured of fads by fasting, and taught to mix with the world on its, not on their terms.

This however only happens to 'auxiliary' officers, of whom it may be said in a general way that they are almost always less limited than the more patrician 'executive' order: they have commonly undergone a chastening in their own service which disposes them to be friendly with the outside world.

This state of things seems, unfortunately, likely to continue; for both Army and Navy, except for a few doctrinaire and generally futile officials at the respective departments, are strenuously opposed to any attempt to widen Service horizons, leaning rather to an ever more rigid specialisation, begun at an even earlier age: the view taken being, one infers, that interests outside the profession are supererogatory and distracting, tending to a watering down of the essential military qualities. The history of the recent Army Education Corps (a product of the short-lived enthusiasms of victory) is a case in point: in spite of its incorporation of yesterday, the 'axe' cut it down by two-thirds, and conditions were attached to future commissions in it which practically amount to suppression. "What do Tommies want with education?" . . . That is the average Service comment; and the officers composing the corps are looked at askance.

But the characteristic Service attitude towards others, understandable as it may be, is by no means without its harmful reactions. The Maltese complain bitterly of it, with much justice; and I had often to console them with the information that the treatment received by them is not a bit worse than that accorded by the same people to their own compatriots in garrison-towns at home. *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*—that was

the Roman theory for dealing with dependent peoples. In Malta, as elsewhere, there is a tendency among us English to transpose the adverbs ; and to this transposition we have owed much trouble, and may owe more.

CHAPTER VI

NOW WE SHAN'T BE LONG !

ON the second day out Corsica and Sardinia relieved the monotony of quarter-speed, and in the evening of the third day the uninspiring coast of western Sicily glowed yellow as butter in the full glare of the sun. But it was enough that it was Sicily, with Grgenti not far off, and Marsala plain to the eye.

Sing-song, sing-song, went the engines: they had kept up the same little tune all the way from Marseilles. Twilight came down over fading Sicily, the sea darkened around, and suddenly a full moon was in the sky. There was dancing on deck, cigar smoke, the murmur of voices, laughter. And over it all—*sing-song, sing-song*, and the hiss of the displaced sea.

Early next morning we rushed on deck half-clad to find the engines still at it, *sing-song, sing-song*, through the bluest of morning waters close in under a steep coast-line of yellow cliffs totally without verdure, and shimmering unreally in a haze of heat, above the whisper of the waves.

Malta !

Here, however, the writer pauses to think. He is approaching the danger-zone. He is now, as it were, within hearing of that sensitive race, the Maltese, which is totally unused to outspoken criticism. Tough enough in very many respects, in respect of criticism the Maltese skin, like that

of the true princess in the fairytale, is able to detect a pea through several thicknesses of mattress. In a sense other than that of the Psalmist, the Maltese are "ready for scourges"—so ready indeed that they frequently cry out before they are hurt. Like all very sensitive people, they are on the look-out for slights ; among themselves, even a disposition to 'sing small' in the general chorus of self-praise is regarded by 'true-believers' as savouring of heresy. What is the writer to do, who has much friendly criticism to offer ?

The Maltese are unused to open criticism, because, like certain species of bird elsewhere, in Malta they are protected from sniping. No Maltese, however clearly he may perceive the national foibles (and many do perceive them), will ever, by open comment, draw down upon his head the certain fate of Aristides the Just ; for in all small and jealous communities ostracism is still a very real risk. It is probable, for very many years yet to come, that all Maltese works of reflexive criticism will have to be sub-titled "*Home Thoughts from Abroad*".

As for the English in Malta, these are for the most part "men under authority :" to any of whom, if he be imprudently outspoken, it may be said 'Go'—and he goeth ! It very often has been said ; whenever the 'game-law' has been seriously infringed by an Englishman on the spot, authority has removed him from the spot—with a spot against his name ! One has to be very careful indeed, for even a joke has been known to "pursue like raging hounds its father and its prey". Hence, I think, arises much of the unfairness of the English attitude towards Maltese ; for we dislike being forced to walk like Agag,

and think poorly of a people which is apt to make a Kaiser's telegram out of any word which offends its prejudices.

Well, I am not a Maltese, so I need not fear ostracism ; neither am I on the spot, so I need not apprehend ignominious ejection from it. I am writing in London, where we all say what we like of one another. But I do not like, and I do not want, to say anything which might reasonably wound my many Maltese friends, for whom I retain the highest regard and affection. There are many important respects, I truly think, in which we English might profitably learn of the Maltese ; but equally there are many others, no less important, in which—and more especially now that they have achieved the doubtful boon of self-government—they will have to learn of us. For instance, they *must* learn not to whine and whimper and ruffle up when they are teased or criticised ; they *must* school themselves to be less thin-skinned, and less cocksure that all their favourite prejudices about themselves and their island are self-evident propositions to the rest of the world. At present Malta is more than a little like the America of Charles Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and its attitude towards itself too much like that of Mr. Hannibal Chollop, when he said :—

“ We are the intellect and virtue of the airth, the cream of human natur', and the flower of moral force. Our backs is easy ris. We must be cracked up, or they rises, and we snarls. We shows our teeth, I tell you, fierce. You'd better crack us up, you had ! ”

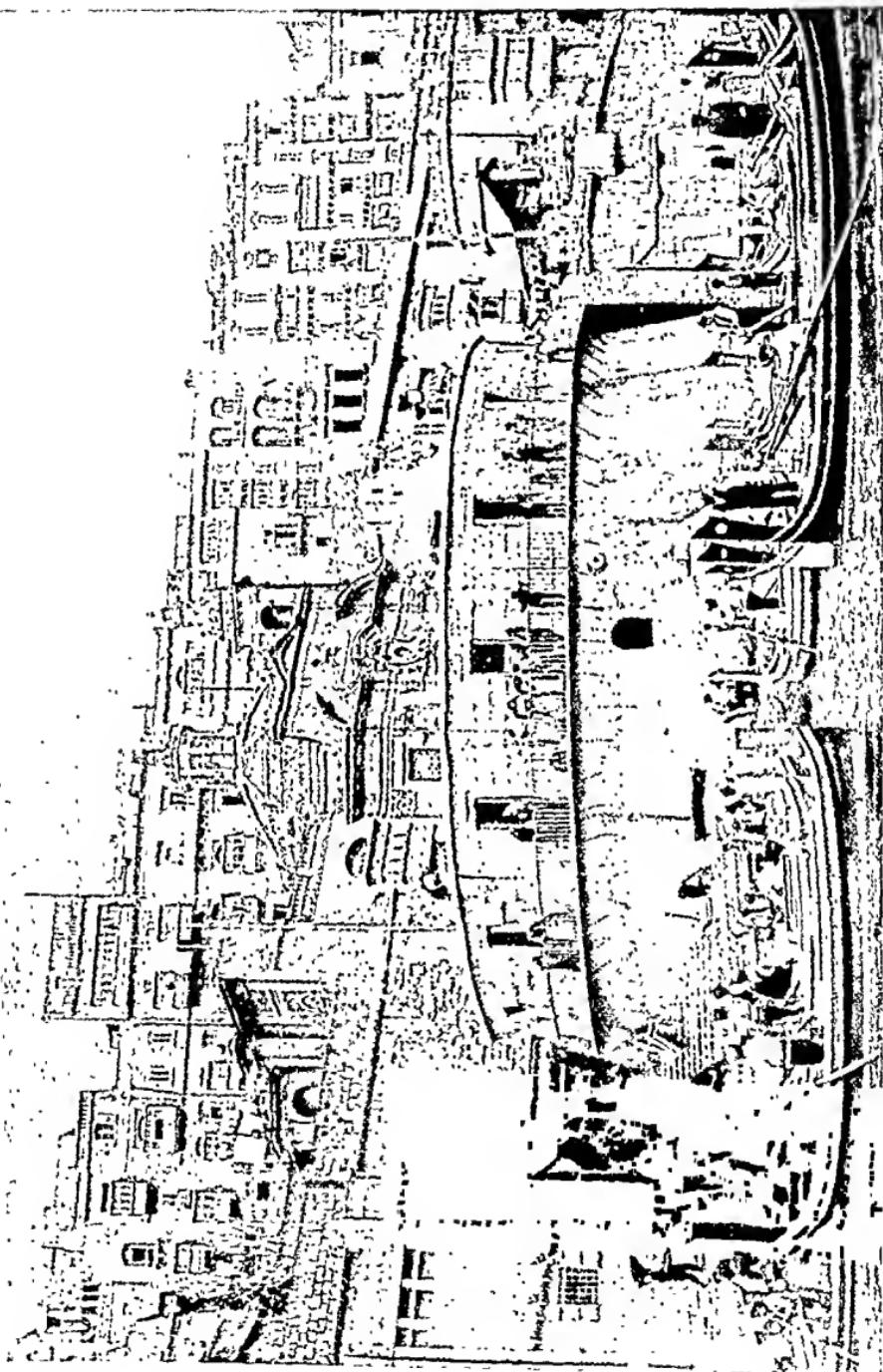
Frankly, I am not going to ‘ crack up ’ Malta in this book, except where Malta deserves to be cracked up ; but neither — to use another

Americanism—am I going to ‘knock’ the island, just for the sake of the exercise. I happened to have to live for three years in Malta, and I propose to say just exactly what it was like.

Many quite honest people have assured me that they admired the coast of Malta as they first beheld it from the sea. The cliffs are certainly fine and sheer, but to me, on a first survey, I must own it was direly unprepossessing. Dry as a bone, burnt like a biscuit, yellow as a guinea! As I gazed, the continuous sing-song of the engines was like an ungenerous chuckle over the zero of one’s spirits. All around us on deck others bound for Malta likewise gazed, with comments according to their reactions; and in the saloon later a lady kept jumping excitedly up to look out through the port-hole, only to be pulled back each time by her husband, with the grim remark that she would “see more than enough of that island before she was half through with it”.

When we came on deck again after breakfast, it was to find that the former desolation of baked cliff had given place to an even more desolating prospect of baked buildings. An acclivity of crowded flat roofs met our gaze, with the domes and belfries of churches, and beyond it all a bald hillside of no great height with a sky-line broken by the façades of large buildings. The talkative nun, who was now in a state of the wildest excitement, told us that what we saw was Sliema, the favourite residential suburb, and that the largest of the buildings on the hill was nothing less than the convent of her Order. She, I may say, adored Malta, where she had lived in her youth; and she would, like St. Peter, have thrown herself into the sea at sight of the convent, had not her

A BIT OF VALLETTA
Seen from the Grand Harbour



orders constrained her to proceed to Egypt. As it was, she broke into an extempore lecture for our benefit ; from which we learned that Sliema, every inch of which we were loathing from our souls, was " where the English lived " and reputed something of a beauty spot.

But enough of these half-baked impressions of wholly-baked Malta as seen from the sea ! It is but fair to add that we were arriving (for " the preparation of syllabi ") in early September, when, after the fierce heats of the summer, one might search the island from end to end with a powerful magnifying-glass and discover not a trace of vegetation more inspiring than dust-blanchéd oleanders and sprawling carobs. Nothing but baked earth is then to be seen, yellow and red, and the loose-piled stones of the walls which bank up the precious earth of the tiny fields ; the whole island at this time has an indescribably *dilapidated* appearance—as though an earthquake had shaken it, or the end of the world but yesterday occurred, leaving nobody alive to tidy up !

But it was vastly different when we had passed the open mouth of the Marsamuscetto Harbour, the great inlet which separates Sliema from Valletta,—when we had rounded the jutting rock-tongue which is the seat of the city of the Knights and turned in between the two breakwaters. Turned in where ? Turned in to the Grand Harbour, the supreme glory of Malta, a vast and deep lagoon of cerulean water, with the high bastions and crowning palaces of Valletta to the right, and to the left the picturesque confusion of the Three Cities, Senglea, Cospicua and Vittoriosa.

Here at least one can praise almost without

stint ; for there exists in all the world nothing lovelier and more imposing of its kind than this splendid natural harbourage, with its bastioned sides rising to fair cities, its stern magnificence of motionless ships of war, its gaiety of changing colour and myriad animation. The tints of Valletta, on that cloudless September morning, untainted by Sirocco, were as though ocean itself had spumed an ideal city from the flying rainbows of its foam ; the whole mass of it seemed to have arisen, flawless already in beauty, like Cytherea herself from the very soul of the sea. In a minute from the splash of our anchor in the still water under the radiant bastions, the vessel was surrounded by vivid Maltese gondolas (*dghaisas*) with summer canopies of white, while almost naked boys in tiny coracles like Moses' basket were screaming for coins after which they might dive. It was a beautiful sight to see their bodies flicker downwards through the green translucency of the water.

Disraeli has written of Valletta, and Thackeray, and Walter Scott. Each has praised it after his fashion, as none could fail to do. But Disraeli's criticism is just, notwithstanding ; Valletta just fails to be perfect for the lack of one thing. If behind Valletta, as behind Mentone, as behind Naples and Genoa, there arose sharply a foil of upstanding mountains, then the city indeed were almost too good to be true. But Malta nowhere rises above eight hundred feet, and even this modest elevation is not attained until many miles beyond Valletta. Hence the jewel-city is a jewel unset : a thing (like so much else in Malta) to be taken alone, without any help—but rather hindrance—from its background.

We had arrived.

CHAPTER VII

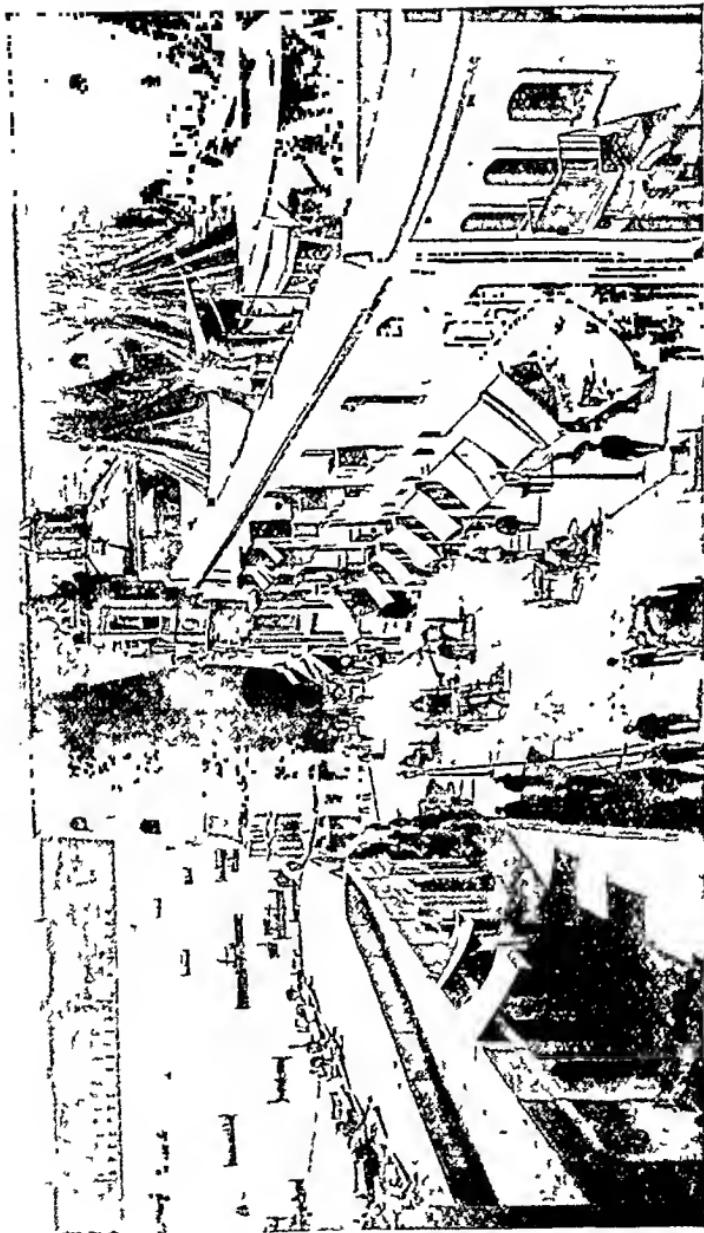
THE AMENITIES OF MALTA

FOR my own part, I always found Maltese officials, from the highest to the lowest, extremely courteous, patient, competent and obliging : in which respect they were a refreshing alterative after post-war England. I think, if anything were really wanted to clinch the non-Italian origin of the Maltese race, the difference in this one particular between the peninsula and its pendent might almost be held to provide it. Coming back to Malta from Sicily, I never felt that I was exchanging one sort of "Dago" for another (I use the word "Dago" in its uninvidious dictionary sense) ; and I hesitate to attribute the undeniable difference entirely to a century of association with ourselves. Indeed, though this association might go some way towards accounting for the *competence* of Maltese officials, it throws no light whatever on their *courtesy* ; the English jack-in-office being no model for anybody in this regard. However, there exists a small but noisy faction in Malta which is quite sure it is "Dago"—and which, to do it justice, certainly looks it.

I must not at this point begin to discuss the great Race question of Malta—who is Melita, what is She?—nor its pendent questions of language and culture. All that will come more fitly later on, when I have inducted myself in my professorial

robe and chair. All that I meant to do by complimenting the Maltese officials was to let it be understood that we got off the ship and through the rather exacting customs, comfortably and soon. The doctor came on board, we were all ordered to report ourselves daily to the District Medical Officer for twelve days (!), and then there was nothing to let or hinder us from getting into a gondola and going ashore. A year later, when returning to Malta from Taormina by an Italian steamer, we were less lucky ; for on that occasion an Arab bound for Tripoli died on board during the night, and we were all kept several hours on deck next morning, standing, in a broiling Sirocco, while relays of doctors "sat on" the Arab, finding at long last that he had succumbed to the general effects of extreme old age !

The way by which we drove in a carozzi to our hotel in Strada Reale was highly eastern in appearance, the streets being narrow, high, steep, and teeming with life and colour. But I at any rate felt as I looked this way and that, that I was in a strange land ; and, when one feels like this with any intensity of a place where one is going to live and work, it gives rise to painful tremors in the region of the solar-plexus. I have seldom felt more depressed and forlorn—more "accidental and enforced", as Ruskin says—than on that first drive from the Marina to Strada Reale. The rattling of the wheels on the cobbles, the plunging of the horse, the shouts and antics of the driver, who was feeling *very* cheerful at having a couple of greenhorns to charge, and, generally, the unfamiliar sounds and sights around, all contributed to the feeling of panic which crept up my back and reduced my nerves "to their infancy



VALLETTA

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(The way we drove up from the Marina on arrival)

again". Only once again did I feel equally uprooted, and that was three years later, when, quite broken down in health and by this time with a ten-months baby for part of our luggage, we repeated the journey the other way round, to leave Malta via Naples for home,—as it proved, for good.

Possibly, to appreciate Valletta fully, one should come there by way of Tunis ; for that would afford some sort of criterion by which to estimate the astonishing order and cleanliness of this city in comparison with others in the same parts. I recommend this route (with two days in Tunis) to the Malta Tourist Association, when it begins to cater for visitors on a large scale. Valletta, I suppose, has always been the cleanest of southern towns, for it is unlikely that the Knights of St. John, who built it, with all their hospital experience in Palestine, would suffer their stately *auberges* to stand amid squalor and its constant threat of disease. The city is nobly planned, on the most enlightened hygienic principles, and admirably ventilated : its streets—running lengthways and crossways, and cutting at the curtest of right angles—affording free circulation to every current of air. The success of the Knights in arranging things thus simply goes to show what can be done, even far south, if people will but put their conscience and civilisation into town-planning. Squalor and slums the world over are simply the result of *Laissez-faire*—of slovenliness, cynicism, and (in their industrial origins in England) of sheer, downright, brutal, stupid wickedness. Human beings, not less than pigs, respond to a régime of order and cleanliness, though, like pigs again, they can give an impression of living quite

cheerfully and naturally in far other conditions. In England nowadays we are beginning to be quite morbidly solicitous about pigs, because we have discovered that the creatures pay better for the outlay on space for exercise and clean, well-ventilated sties. . . . Is it, I wonder, too much to hope that we shall someday make the same discovery about human beings?

The Maltese may have got tired of the rule of the Knights, which I daresay was slack enough towards the close; but they owe a great deal to that rule, notwithstanding. They get impatient with us now and then—a thing which need cause no particular surprise; but at least our rule has insisted, more strenuously than would any other, on the preservation and development of all this inherited order and cleanliness. Sliema, I am told, used to afford some rather cautionary instances of what Maltese would do and leave undone when left to themselves! A people which multiplies, and makes a principle of multiplying, as fast as the Maltese, should be grateful for a control which has resolutely kept them up, in spite of their Sirocco-born slackness, to the highest possible standard of the modern Law of Moses.

Meanwhile, we have arrived at our hotel, and been welcomed—really welcomed—by the agreeable and obliging Maltese family which owns it. It is typical of Maltese forethought for the stranger that the young proprietor of the hotel had, without prompting from me, sent a courier on board the transport to meet us, help with the luggage, and protect us from the extortions of watermen and cabdrivers. The Maltese really do put their imagination into the courtesies and hospitalities of life.

Of the Maltese standard of comfort, as revealed in their dwelling-houses and hotels, I can only say that it appears to be a genuine instance of that "cultural affinity" with Italy which one hears so much about. Certainly, they are not a comfortable people, according to our ideas. Their furniture looks as if it had been handed down from generation to generation ; and they like a congestion of it in every room, the heaviest sort, and a riot of knick-knack. Nowhere is there to be seen such a crushing impact of furniture, such a sheer botheration of inconvenient oddment, as in many Maltese homes ; it is a job sometimes to find room for a tea-cup anywhere but on the floor, and hardly so much as a fly could walk on the wall-space between pictures.

Maltese houses are all built of the soft local stone—so soft that it can be sawn into blocks like wood ; they have flat roofs, put to a hundred diverse uses (drying clothes, keeping chickens), and usually a central air-shaft running from top to bottom, the floor of which is used as a conservatory. The front door is not as a rule directly on the street, but you open a low brass-topped gate and take a few steps down a dark passage before you come to it ; when the door is opened, you find yourself as a rule involved among the plant-pots of the air-shaft, and you have to climb up a steep stone staircase with iron balustrades before you come to the living-rooms. The floors are all tiled, and the walls mostly distempered—often with the addition of a fantastic frieze, tormenting, not to say enraging, to the eye. The rooms are high—too high often for their width, which, owing to the air-shaft's demands on space, is often not great ; and they open out of one

another in suites, so that you may have to walk apologetically through a bedroom on your way to a study. In summer, of course, all the carpets are taken up, but, unfortunately, the teeming knick-knack remains; so that a room presents the paradoxical appearance of being both bare and crowded, fussy and yet austere, at one and the same time. In winter nothing can express the dankness of these rooms, for the Maltese, though feeling the cold acutely, have a horror of open fires, and prefer an oil-stove which they carefully keep at a distance. Generally, one might say of the Maltese in their domestic arrangements that they seem never to have quite made up their minds between east and west, but have a leaning towards the less commodious features of both.

The drawing-rooms, where one is entertained at the typical Maltese *omnium gatherum* tea-party, are often of semi-ecclesiastical decoration, with plenty of gilt and crimson plush, mirrors with elaborate candelabra attached, bamboo whatnots on crossed tituppy legs, chandeliers as umbrageous as trees, and enormous prints representing, for choice, scenes from sacred history and from the legend of the saints.

As for the poorer classes, it is a good thing for them that the climate permits them to live largely out of doors; for the glimpses I had of their interior domesticity left me with the impression that even a cat must find it a bit of an obstacle-race to get about among the furniture. Many poor Maltese families live in stables! But really this accommodation is not as bad as it sounds; if a bit draughty in winter, in summer, with the wide doors open, it has the supreme merit of

airiness : I for one should vastly prefer one of these stables to many of the houses.

While I am on this subject of houses, I may as well relate an amusing experience of our own. Only our first house in Malta (a furnished one, on the Sliema front) was taken from a Maltese family. It was their summer residence, and, in itself, not a bad sort of place (though jerry-built), with large rooms and wide passages. Our first act on taking over was of course to clear out from the front room, where we proposed mainly to live, all the superfluous pieces of solid furniture, pictures, and knick-knacks, which gave it as it stood its general appearance of a pawnbroker's annexe. This done, we made a careful selection of just a few articles, such as could be lived with without too severe a strain, and furnished the room withal. Into this room we later had occasion (of which more anon) to introduce our landlord ; who gazed around him, completely puzzled, but offering no comment. Just before leaving, however, his curiosity got the better of him ; and, as he was being shown out, he murmured wistfully to me, with a comprehensive gesture towards our arrangements : "But Professor, what *are* you going to do with this room ?" As it contained only a couch, half a dozen chairs and a table, together with a writing-desk in the window, to him it appeared as though we had emptied it, preparatory to some possibly sensational further use. No doubt he went home and told his wife that these queer tenants preferred to sit on the floor in the middle of unfurnished rooms.

It has always been a wonder to me that so much of the floating English population of Malta should inevitably gravitate to Sliema. I have met

Maltese who will not go near the spot, and it always struck me as quite the nastiest bit of the island. Our own term of residence there belonged to our 'green' days, and we were simply suggested into it by the general assumption that "*of course*, we should want to live in Sliema!" I know we bitterly rued our suggestibility. Take one objection alone: Valletta must be reached from Sliema every day by steam-ferry or dghaisa across the Marsamuscetto Harbour, which, when certain winds are blowing at all fresh, is a miniature Bay of Biscay. I have crossed that harbour, both by launch and dghaisa, with my heart in my mouth! The launches are flat-bottomed, and their behaviour in a heavy swell can be imagined; a friend of mine used to say that the launches rocked if you so much as threw a cigarette-end into the water beside them! As for the passage by dghaisa, this in rough weather is a V-shaped course: up against the sea, sharp turn, and down with the waves behind you. It is a bleak sensation when your two oarsmen (standing to the work, with their backs towards you in the stern) push further and further up towards the roaring harbour-mouth while the waves rise higher and yet higher, until one has no view at all but the sides of enormous green seas, gnashing white teeth in the upper air. The skill with which the watermen make the passage is wonderful; the dghaisa is a splendidly seaworthy craft, though so graceful of design; and the oarsmen know a thousand tricks for the baffling of the sea, so that, even in the roughest crossings, you seldom ship anything but spume. But then, at a point, the police suspend both launches and dghaisas; and the luckless dweller in Sliema is faced with the alternative of an

endless carozzi drive right round the end of the harbour, or a motor-bus driven over skiddy roads by a too, too light-hearted Maltese chauffeur. Some of these buses do not *look* in the best state of repair; and the drivers, though admittedly skilful, take such risks with a full load that I, for one, preferred the dreary carozzi.

For the rest, bathing and (perhaps) children apart, I do not see where the attraction of Sliema lies. The houses on the front are badly built—which is not the case elsewhere in Malta; the drainage, I am convinced, is inferior; and, in short, the place to my mind is ugly—inconvenient, exposed to the most violent winds, too near the sea, and suburban in atmosphere. It is a privilege to live in Valletta, that fine city of the knights; and it is at least an experience to live in the centre of the island, within the walls of the old rock-capital of Notabile, a Roman foundation: Bighi has points, as Nelson long ago perceived when he made it the site of a great naval hospital; Attard is pretty and countrified; Florian, though otherwise detestable, is at least next-door to Valletta on the same side of the harbour. . . . But Sliema, Sliema is a prejudice.

From the houses to the churches is a natural step in pious Malta; for the nearest church is almost an extra room to the Maltese family. A first view of Valletta gives the impression of a church to every half-dózen houses. And indeed the number is very striking. Only in Rome, I should think, is it paralleled; and not even in Rome is the number so plain to the eye. There are many religious orders established in Valletta, each having its large public oratory; some of which, according to the popularity of the order,

are crowded from morning till night. It is a common thing, at the various hours of service, to have to get off the footpath and make a fairly wide detour, to avoid an overflow of worshippers. 'Room, room, plenty of room' is a hymn which would not apply in Maltese churches.

The architecture of the churches is mostly all of one style—an Italianate; coloured dome, two tall belfries: handsome enough of their kind. They are lavishly decorated both within and without; especially in front, where stand as a rule two or more colossal stone saints with flowing beards and open books. Inside they are dark, as becomes a hot country; highly ornate, with elaborate High Altar, numerous chapels, pictures, images, lamps and votive candle-stands. The interiors are apt to smell rather dubious—but little air being admitted, and clients forever on the come and go, to say nothing of devotions rapidly succeeding one another; but the close atmosphere is richly ambered with incense, which in Malta still has its early hygienic, as well as its later devotional use. Every entrance has a heavy dingy screen hung inside it, damp and obnoxious to the touch (like a greasy eider-down quilt), which must be put aside in order to get in and out.

Attending service at a popular hour is not bliss. Pews are of course not known, but rush-seated chairs are handed out by sacristans and attendants with a quite marvellous dexterity and expedition. Immense erections of these are bandied about too and fro above the worshippers, who betray not the slightest uneasiness. But when you have got your chair, the problem is—where to put it? People are very accommodating in making room—none of that selfish English 'sitting fat'; but very often

there is simply no room to be made. The floors are usually one dense mass of kneeling people, and the attitude of kneeling involves the most fearsome ambuscades of human legs. You can pick your way over skirts and among legs for a long time, with your chair presented like a rifle in front of you or worn like a hat on the head, without ever coming upon a spot where its four feet can stand. One feels like Noah's Dove. Then, when at last you have found a niche into which you can more or less fit, there arises the question of the chair itself. You have borne it far and feel an affection for it for that reason, but, when you come to look it over, there is a reluctance to sit on it. Very likely it is very old and knocked-about, with a loose back and broken seat What lurking-places for—hush ! There are sure to be fleas in abundance on the floor, when fleas, as Mrs. Crupp said of oysters, "is in"; and you rise for the reading of the Gospel with one leg climbing soothingly up the other. At least, I always did.

In Malta all sorts and conditions of people attend the same church. Just as it should be, I hear the English Catholic say severely; and I agree. Yes, but the flesh is very weak, and, in spite of the loud applause of the spirit, one feels very unhappy when one resists the impulse to withdraw from the proximity of some unspeakably filthy old *miserabile*. Henry Harland, in one of his pleasing tales, has an edifying story *a propos*. . . . One of his Prince Fortunates of a hero is attending Mass at a little Italian church, and a *miserabile* comes and kneels beside him; his senses are offended, and for a moment he thinks of finding a place in the aristocratic tribune. But better

feelings come to his aid, he remembers the saints, and in short, stays where he is. Whereupon the loathly figure of the old beggar gives off the sweet savours and radiant light of the Risen Christ.

I protest against this kind of story. It isn't fair. The very first words of God, addressed to humanity through Moses, were about cleanliness and hygiene. What evidence is there that Christ liked dirt and sores ? The Jews were a notably clean people ; according to their law, dirt is impious as well as unpleasant. That Christ would be lenient and tender to the filthiest old beggar, we may be sure ; but I think we may be equally sure of his attitude towards the society which permits such conditions. It is sentimental and silly to mediævalise the Divine character in this way ; if there is anything at all to be gathered from the Old Testament, we may at any rate fairly claim to know what God thinks of dirt. . . . And I do not believe that *this* part of the old dispensation was superseded by the new. I strenuously repugn the mediæval imagination which conceives of Christ as baiting traps with beggars' rags to catch people who take a bath.

While the Mass is in progress in a Maltese parish-church, suddenly—from far at the back—a stentorian voice is raised reciting the rosary. The congregation makes the responses *en masse*, and this is kept up, with the aid of litanies, ejaculations, and what not, all though the service. Thus the privacy and silence of the Mass is entirely destroyed. Sometimes the voice is fine and sonorous ; more often as flat as a chipped plate ; sometimes suggesting the monologue of a gargoyle : but, whatever the voice is like, you have got to put up

with it, and be thankful if there is no singing ! The Maltese claim to be a musical people, but one with less notion of a tune I never came across ; though it is always possible of course that, like our high-brow musicians at home, they hold that tunes are not music. When first a Maltese congregation 'made a joyful noise' in my hearing, I simply did not know what/ could be happening. If I had been in a primitive Methodist conventicle, I should have assumed that a sudden overwhelming sense of sin had afflicted many at once to groans and hootings in concert, but, as the place was a catholic church, I could only gaze around me 'with a wild surmise'. But it was only a tuning up for the 'O Salutaris'. A celebrant at High Mass is often a good form of mortification too.

But a real full-dress ceremony at St. John's Co-Cathedral, once the conventional church of the Knights, is a fine effect. Then are the world-famous tapestries displayed, the solid-silver apostles ranged upon the altar ; then does an orchestra of reeds and strings support the organ, and trained singers give voice from gilded tribunes. Then does every canon assume a lofty white mitre, and His Grace the Archbishop-bishop is enthroned in gorgeous pontificals. The colour effect in the sanctuary is a feast of beauty, and there the Maltese boy may be seen looking like the little angel *which he isn't*.

Never shall I forget the first time when, without warning, all the canons assumed mitres in my presence ! Raising my eyes, I beheld this phenomenon. . . . And fell, like Mrs. Gamp, into a walking-swoon ! I thought I beheld a miracle—the multiplying of his Grace !

But a full-dress ceremony, say at Easter, is as

fine a 'Romish pageant' as you shall anywhere see. Then shall you behold his Grace—if not multiplied—at least attended, preceded, and brought up in the rear, as he sweeps from point to point about the altar. Then shall you see the archiepiscopal crozier first rendered into his hand to whom alone it belongs, anon taken from it; his crimson cap now suddenly on his head, now mysteriously off it; his glittering mitre now crowning his brow, now reposing against the snow-white breast of an acolyte. And now, behold, how he seats himself upon his throne amid universal genuflexions; and again how to outbursts of music he arises from it, while imposing hierophants prostrate themselves before his feet, and over his head resplendent canopies unfold. And all the while there is such a coming and going of magnificent coadjutors, such a scurrying and falling over one another of urchins in ephods, such an ascending and descending of carpeted steps, such a flaming of candles, swinging of censers, chanting of psalms and ringing of bells, as serves indeed to remind you that the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church has forgotten no jot or tittle of the superb pomp which she learnt long ago from the autumnal splendour of the Cæsars in the days of imperial Rome.

Are the Maltese really pious? The Maltese are pious indeed. Nowhere in the world are the numerous commands, obligations, recommendations and injunctions, of Holy Church so punctually and frequently fulfilled by so overwhelming a majority of the laity. Nowhere is the rosary so incessantly recited, the confessional more frequented, the innumerable celebrations better attended. Visiting bishops are delighted, cardinals eminently edified; glowing reports are

carried to the ear of the Holy Father at Rome. Church-going is the very breath of Maltese life : it is a sight to see the immense throngs emerging and scattering under the portals of St. John's. And the loyalty of the people to the Holy See is 'proverbial' : let but a bull, brief or encyclical, issue from the Infallible Wisdom at Rome, and the whole people of Malta will unite in fervent protestations of obedience. What the 'bull' is about, against whom or what its horn is turned, that perhaps the people may not know or greatly care ; it is enough for them that the Thrower of Thunderbolts, Earth-shaker, is infallible — the Voice of God himself : declared so by the holy fathers and most learned doctors of the universal Church, assembled together in solemn conclave, inspired by the Holy Ghost, at the hub and centre of the world, in the Vatican at Rome. It is their duty as pious catholics and devoted children of Holy Mother Church to conform, not question ; theology is for the clergy, politics for the laity. Let the Pope only *not* declare for or against a specific policy in the Maltese State, let him not prescribe their cultural affinities or define their origin,—and he need never fear to lose a subject in pious Malta !

Theirs not to reason why :
Theirs but the rosary,
Theirs but the (low or high)
Mass, and recurrently
Theirs the confession !

CHAPTER VIII

PALLAS AND THE PALACE

THAT first morning of ours in Malta was one of torrid heat with a taint of Sirocco in the air, and the prevailing odour of goat from the broiling streets was all but overpowering to our as yet unaccustomed senses. Gay as Strada Reale looked, with its striped awnings and coloured sunshades and white helmets, with its constant come and go of summer-clad people, its passing and re-passing of military and naval uniforms, and its vague, scattered processions of tinkling goats, nevertheless beyond Porta Reale (the gateway into Valletta) the view was appalling to one's verdure-loving English eye by reason of its uniform bleached aridity, hazy with heat, and only relieved by sprawling carobs, as black in the sun as umbrellas. There is commonly one such tree to every field ; but whether because they please the bucolic Maltese eye, or to act as scarecrow, or for the purpose of the noon siesta, I do not know. I cheered myself up as well as I could by buying a suit of white ducks and a panama, and, thus suitably attired, sallied forth to find the university and interview the Rector—if in being.

I say “if in being”, because, as I had heard before leaving England, there had recently been a students’ riot and the former rector had resigned. I did not know if a new appointment had been



UP AND UP AND UP!
A street of steps in Valletta

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made, or what sort of a man he might be ; and I need not dwell on the importance of this matter to myself. On my way down Strada Reale (I could hardly breathe for the heat) I closely observed the swarms of young Maltese who promenaded there, wondering how many of them would prove to be students, and what sort of a time I was in for.

I arrived at the university by way of the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, where I had a letter of introduction : here a clerk was told off to show me the way, which, but for his aid, I should not soon have found, since nobody in Valletta ever seems to know where its principal seat of learning is. Even carozzi-drivers look at one with a pained expression if told to drive to the university. Certainly there is nothing very striking about the premises as one enters them from the street ; they are part of an old Jesuit college, and, viewed from immediately in front, consist of nothing but a long blank wall, with a single unpretentious (indeed rather dirty) entrance in the middle. If Newman is right in his 'Idea of a University', worse premises for such a purpose there could not well be.

However, there is a Greek inscription over the door : which is very reassuring, not to say improving—especially as Greek is not studied in Malta ; and, failing myself to translate this inscription (which has a Pelasgian look), I followed my guide along a short, dark passage, whence a flight of wide stone steps let upward. Mounting these steps, we emerged into an extensive but cheerless corridor, adorned inevitably with classical statuary and geological charts. From these indications of culture I judged that I was in the home of Maltese learning.

The impression was soon confirmed. The corridor had numerous doors opening off it, over each of which appeared a stone scroll with 'Theologia', 'Philosophia,' and the like terms upon it. Following my guide along the corridor, and turning two rectangular corners, I descried at length what had the appearance of offices, but was at present barricaded against entrance by two workmen, a ladder, and several pails of colour-wash. My guide speaking firmly to the workmen in their common tongue, way was made for us; and, passing behind a glass partition, I came in the presence of several shirt-sleeved persons who might, I thought, prove to be registrars, etc.

At this point the young man from the Bank adjusted a truly Achillean helmet he was wearing and withdrew.

It appeared from the demeanour of the putative registrars that I was not expected. Quite obviously they had not the least idea who I might be, and upon me devolved the duty of 'putting them wise'. I do so, and . . . click! a transformation-scene! Behold me, being beamed broadly upon and having my arm almost shaken out of its socket.

Two minutes later, passing a green-baize door, I was being introduced to the Rector.

In the instance of the Rector I shall suspend my rule touching direct personalities, and introduce in person and by name Professor Themistocles Zammit D.Litt. (Oxon.). Almost everybody will think I invented that name, but it so happens I did not; it is the real name of the man, and it adds just the requisite touch of quaintness to a singularly original and lovable character. Among his coevals and intimates Dr. Zammit is always

known as 'Temmy'; and where a man has achieved an affectionate nick-name, it is usually because he deserves it. Universities may confer degrees, but love confers the nick-names that stick.

One glance at the figure in the chair was enough to dispel my misgivings: here was a man one could work and get on with, a scholar and gentleman upon whom one could rely.

A word must be said about Dr. Zammit and what he has done—what I hope he will long continue to do. The University of Oxford does not lightly award its degrees *honoris causa*, but it has delighted to honour Dr. Zammit; to whom, on the occasion of its doing so, the Public Orator most happily referred as "this versatile man". Dr. Zammit is indeed versatile; his sciences are legion, his public services innumerable; but, what is more, he is a sincere, kindly, upright, patient man, whom any university might be proud to have for its head, and any country for its citizen. Dear Dr. Zammit! If I had got nothing else out of my three years in Malta, his friendship alone would have made them well worth while.

Dr. Zammit is the distinguished archæologist whose labours have revealed the surpassing interest of the Maltese islands in this respect. What he does not know about the Stone Age, is not worth knowing. His renown may justly be called 'European', and every year the numerous *savants* whom he attracts to Malta from far and wide are delighted no less by his warm-hearted and enthusiastic personality, than by the extraordinary interest of what he has to show them. The Valletta Museum, of which Dr. Zammit is curator, is practically entirely the accumulation of his

own researches: no finer collection of Stone Age exhibits is to be seen anywhere.

On this first occasion the Rector no doubt judged that I had better be let down gently, to grow into my knowledge of Malta University by degrees. He said little about the institution, except that I must not expect too much of the students, or overheat myself in the performance of my duties. I took his somewhat cryptic remarks for humour at the time, not realising the wise significance that underlay them. Immediately afterwards, he began to try to convert me to the study of archæology: in which respect I fear I was a disappointment to him throughout. However, though unconverted, I began to love Dr. Zammit at once for his charming enthusiasm; and I may say here, with regard to it, that not the least of this distinguished scientist's many pretty ways is the entire simplicity with which he will himself at all times show quite ordinary tourists round his discoveries, explaining things to them as painstakingly as if he were his own deputy.

One would think that so distinguished a man as Dr. Zammit, one who reflects so much honour on Malta and its university, would be loyally supported, both by students and staff, in his difficult office of rector. Things may indeed have changed since the time of which I am writing, but then the truth was far otherwise. The students, to my huge disgust, showed very little respect for his authority—or indeed for any authority; and members of the professorial staff, subject as such to the rector's chair, would appear in the courts *against him* in some one of the many amazing law-suits instigated against the university by students who failed to pass their examinations.

Verily, Malta is a queer place ! The Maltese compass heaven and earth for something to be nationally proud of, and fail to see that, there in the midst, seated in the too often flouted chair of academic authority, is a true source of national pride, of which they could not possibly do better than *show* themselves proud—by showing respect. But only a few people in Malta find the conduct of these professors strange.

The rector shortly decided that I had better come with him at once and make my bow to H.E. the Governor at his Palace of Valletta. To the palace accordingly we repaired. Entering by an archway off the Square, we went up a spiral flight of broad marble stairs, to emerge at length in a truly palatial corridor, open on one side to a courtyard full of evergreen trees and shrubs, and letting through handsome doors into splendid chambers on the other. The lofty ceilings of this corridor were superbly painted, lay-figures in shining armour stood along it at regular intervals, and the walls were profusely hung with portraits in oils of the most cautionary ecclesiastics : popes, cardinals, legates, inquisitors, bishops, to a number exceeding calculation. What strange company, I reflected, for successive hard-bitten old warriors from protestant England !

Passing along this corridor, we were not long in coming to the A.D.C.'s room, which is connected by an inner door with the sanctum of Excellency. Here we found three red-tabbed officers occupying tables, each under the close patronage of a painted pope in full canonicals, giving to all three an air of great sanctity. The room was darkened with sun-blinds ; so that, what with red-tabs, painted pontiffs, and twilight

—to say nothing of Excellency close at hand,—there fell upon one's spirits a chastening of awe.

I felt acutely conscious of my new white ducks, the trousers of which struck me as having a disdressing resemblance to pyjama-legs after a night of restless slumber. I gazed with awe and envy at the superb military tailoring of the three A.D.C's.

The rector, however, preserved his equanimity and introduced me to a youthful-looking major nearest to the solemn portal through which I must hereafter pass ; it was arranged between us that I should be left there to await the Summons, when the major would push me in, while the rector would return to pick me up after the ordeal. Accordingly the rector took his departure, and I—not without a sense of the dentist's waiting-room—settled down upon a large settee.

The youthful major conversed pleasantly awhile, but then was called away on some business ; I fell back for diversion upon a file of the '*Daily Malta Chronicle*'—that excellent little paper, from the editors whereof I was afterwards to receive much kindness.

Turning over this file, I was at once caught and held by an instructive full-page article on the nature and habits of the bed-bug ! *Toujours la science !* The writer held forth at length on the intelligence of this unpopular insect, which enables it to trek considerable distances in search of a host. He touched with some pathos on the parasite's extreme sensitiveness to cold. . . . "The life of the bed-bug," he declared with emotion, "is one long search after warmth." I read with interest, and some shrinkings of the flesh ; for I remembered the ugsome flat things which had sidled out from

under the pillows at Marseilles ! I resolved that the creatures should need all their damned intelligence to track me, and that their life should be one long frustration and despair where my quarters were concerned.

Coming events cast their shadows before ! I was but too soon to be an authority myself on the nature and habits of these insects.

Shortly afterwards a bell rang peremptorily, a folding-door was thrown open, and I (pyjama-legs, and all) stood in the presence of His Majesty's Most Excellent Representative !

H.E. was standing when I entered ; and, shaking hands with me graciously, he remarked that I had come to Malta to fill a post of great importance. Having had doubts on the subject myself (in view of the salary attached), I deferred with a bow to this gratifying opinion. His Excellency might, I thought, be right ; and in any case one has to agree with governors.

Excellency then seated itself, and humility perched on the edge of a chair within range. The room was most handsome, and there were fewer popes. The desk had been placed well out into the room, so that no pontiff had been able to establish quite the air of proprietorship over His Excellency which diminished the A.D.C's. The features of the illustrious soldier who was then Governor of Malta are well known since the war, so I need only say of his physical presence that he too was attired after a manner which rebuked my legs. What an advantage these soldiers have in their uniforms over us poor civilians ! If discipline is the soul of the army, uniform is the salvation of that soul ; and a man does not feel a man "for a' that and a' that" when confronted.

in pyjama-legs and a jacket rather too small by superlative military breeches, red-tabs and several variegated rows of ribbons.

I will not divulge our conversation : since that sounds so much better than saying that I cannot remember it. It ended, I do recollect, by His Excellency's most kindly giving me permission to come to him direct in any perplexity, and by his thereafter conveying (with that regal change of atmosphere) that the time had come for me to go off and start getting perplexed.

With another bow (I was becoming an accomplished bower) I retired.

CHAPTER IX “OUR POOR STUDENTS”

AN evening or so later I was called away from my dinner at the hotel to interview a solemn little man from the university, who came to tell me that the Malta press had announced my arrival on the island, together with a flattering notice of my previous career. This, I privately thought, was rather clever of the Malta Press! A specimen notice was produced for my inspection, from which I learnt several interesting things about myself.

My little man then informed me that it was the custom in Malta for those noticed by the Press to lose no time in sending a card to the respective editors, suitably inscribed with thanks. I promised to attend to this. Then, with intensified solemnity, my visitor broke it to me that even the *Italian* Press—by which he meant the Maltese papers published in that language—had inserted the notice in *Italian*, and that, whatever my feelings in the matter, it would be highly impolitic not to address to these editors also the suitably-inscribed card. I promptly undertook to thank the Italian-speaking editors with particular fervour, and my instructor appeared relieved.

Though my dinner was cooling the while in the next room, I could see that not everything was yet off my little man's chest, so I encouraged him to proceed. He launched forth accordingly into a

guarded disquisition on politics, being obviously terrified lest I should make a false step or form an erroneous impression. I was not to think, he said, that there was any real pro-Italianism, Irredentism, in Malta ; the Italian propaganda amounted to little more than a preference on the part of the lawyers, priests and others, for the Italian language, which had always been the language of law on the island, and was, moreover, favoured by the clergy as forming a bulwark against insidious encroachments of protestantism. On my looking properly impressed, he added that I must never overlook the 'cultural affinity' which connected the island with the adjacent peninsula. I promised never to lose sight of this fact.

It appeared that still not all was said which ought to be said ; so, abandoning my dinner, I set him going again with a happy allusion to the well-known loyalty of the Maltese nation. This was well received. There was indeed no disloyalty in Malta, he assured me ; but . . . well, I must be prepared for perhaps some slight trouble with the students *at first*, because with many of them, in their youth and inexperience, the prevailing mild form of 'cultural affinity' had become confluent. I must please to remember that there were *certain politicians* (here he coughed and lowered his voice) who made a sort of Prætorian Guard of the "studenti", who, since their successful riot some time ago, had considered themselves a power in the State.

Feeling naturally some considerable interest in this subject, I asked him what the "studenti" had rioted about ; learning that it had arisen out of some proposal to alter the final degree from a doctorate to a mere bachelorhood. The

"studenti" had also wished to shorten the curriculum, and had resented some actions of the governing body. They had made a great deal of noise in the streets, locked the door of the university against the staff, threatened certain persons with bodily violence, and caused themselves to be photographed in many striking postures of defiance. The authorities, both academic and civic, had thought it best to give way on most of the points raised ; wherefore the "studenti" had regarded themselves ever since, and with much justice, as a formidable political force.

I could only shrug my shoulders in silence.

My little man shortly afterwards faded away, but his words did not fade away. Sage and kindly as his warnings were, they did not serve however to keep my inexperience out of constant hot water. My first year's relations with the "studenti" were simply disastrous ; and, had no improvement taken place with the opening of a new course, I should undoubtedly have left Malta sooner than I did.

I shall only put in here, as some indication of what I underwent that first year, the remarks of a Turkish gentleman, a prisoner of war, at that time interned in Malta, but enjoying a wide margin of liberty on parole. He was an educated man, a doctor of medicine, and extensively travelled in east and west. During the war he had been, first, chief of the Turkish medical service in Gallipoli, and later he had gone on a diplomatic mission to Germany, where, as he told me with some humour, he had been saluted by the Kaiser with a kiss !

This Turkish gentleman came to me first for private lessons in English, but afterwards he took also to attending my lectures at the university,

where he sat with great humility among the "studenti". He was astonished, as well he might be, by the curious culture which he found obtaining: for me to be unable to proceed for the shouts jeers and horse-play, was nothing; often and often I have waited almost the whole hour for opportunity even to begin. Sometimes, in despair, I have dismissed the class to its more congenial political conversations in Strada Reale, without a word said; and on these occasions my Turkish friend and sympathiser would follow the students out shaped like his own national crescent with trouble. Nowhere in Turkey, he told me, would such behaviour be either attempted or tolerated; the Turkish students knew better than that, and would be ashamed. There was discipline at Turkish universities for those that needed it; but, what is better, there were good manners and some desire to learn.

Hearing my Turkish friend talk, I could often have found it in my heart to wish, during that first session, that the Turks had captured Malta at the time of the Great Siege, and imposed perhaps a 'cultural affinity' on "our poor students".

I call them "our poor students" because that is how they were always referred to in the numerous newspaper correspondences which broke out after every examination. These examinations became a nightmare to me. The things occurred twice in the year, at Christmas and at Easter; and if a student did not obtain a sufficient percentage of marks in both of them, he was thereby debarred from taking the first session of the annual tests in June. He would have another chance in September, but naturally "our poor students" preferred to have their minds free from anxiety

during the summer. I was a new broom: my notions of examinations were based on English models, and I am afraid I cheerfully ploughed all who did not reach what I judged to be a fair standard of proficiency; the standard adopted being that required for Pass French or German at Oxford. The failures were many, and, O Jupiter, what a fuss followed! "Our poor students!" It will hardly be believed that the resulting agitation got so far as questions asked in the Chamber, but so it was. Funny, if you like; but in a hot climate very trying for the puzzled scapegoat, which was always myself.

The whole tale of my first year's purgatory culminated in the receipt by me, just before the fateful annuals in June, of an anonymous communication, signed with a skull and cross-bones, wherein it was intimated, that in the event of any promising careers being ruined by my prejudice and spite, both my wife and I would be instantly assassinated! It was no use our trying to escape to England (so the document grimly said)—"You will never reach your England!"

This missive was handed to me, along with other correspondence, quite casually one morning in the office of the university. The office staff, of course, had no idea what was inside. I opened it unsuspectingly between two booksellers' circulars, and Imagine my emotions! Of course, it meant just nothing at all as a threat, but, as showing how I was loved and honoured, it was disturbing enough.

A word of summing up, before I quit this part of the story, which is not a cheerful part, for good. There is in Malta, I gladly bear witness, an extremely sound body of public opinion. But it

is furtive, it hesitates to make itself felt ; nor need there be any wonder at this, when it is realised that, in so small a community, it means much to incur the hostility of factions. Somehow, however this sound body of opinion must be brought to bear on the problem of discipline at the university and elsewhere. Perhaps this is already in process of being done.

Reform will not be easy, or come quickly. Powerful factions will resist ; a change of heart is not perfected in a day. But the Maltese public must learn for its own sake to uphold just authority, even where just authority is wrong. A principle is involved. The Maltese will have to show themselves patriots indeed : even to the sacrificing of their own children, like Roman Brutus, to principle, knowing that discipline is the very spine of the state and all its institutions, and that to be contentedly without a spine is to proclaim 'cultural affinities' very far back in biology. They have to put it to themselves that it were much better for a boy never to go to school at all, than for him to go and be let break rules and defy authority. Illiteracy is a small thing compared with the harm done to national character by such licence. A very little dexterous application of the cane in the Lyceum and other schools—indeed, the mere sense that it was on the premises and might be used with effect by an expert—would go far to solve the whole problem of discipline at the schools now and at the university later. In a generation the beneficent effects of this wand would be felt in the councils of government.

Once on a time the English Jesuit Fathers had a college in Malta, and . . . but why say more ? They soundly spanked one generation of "our

poor students" into the good fellows they really are for the most part. Now, the cry is all for them to return, and perhaps some time they may. But if they do return, they will come armed with plenty of ferulas and even birches, which they will doubtless apply—appropriately—with science and system.

A boy was once reproved at a Roman Catholic school for ungentlemanly behaviour. "But," remonstrated the culprit, "why shouldn't I do so? It isn't a sin!"

This incident did not occur in Malta—and I may say it was told me, not by a rabid protestant, but by a distinguished Roman Catholic monsignore. Anyhow, there you have the attitude. It isn't a sin! Boys pick up the theology which serves them just as they pick up other things. Many things however are not sins which yet lead to the ruin of character.

Some of the best men I knew in Malta had been pupils of the English Jesuits while these had a college in Malta. The Jesuits do not spare the rod. But I have heard many fine Maltese gentlemen say of the English Jesuits what it would please those reverend (and flagellant) fathers very much to hear.

CHAPTER X

'IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION'

COMMON fairness, both to myself and the students of Malta, demands a word or two more about my experiences as a teacher of English at the University. Courses at Malta University start, not every year, but every three years, and it was my misfortune to lead off with a 'course' already in its third year, set in its ways and thoroughly out of hand. Trembling for their 'careers', which they rightly divined to be endangered by new methods, the members of this course definitely went to work to break my spirit and, possibly, induce me to resign.

On my return to Malta after the first summer's vacation, which I had spent delightfully at home and travelling in Italy and France, I naturally found myself in better spirits; and these were not at all impaired when I realised that a new course had begun, consisting of much younger students, of ingenuous and even attractive appearance. Not one had as yet come in contact with the seniors, or absorbed the traditions of the institution: I remember well how they first struck me as I ran my eye along the rows . . . I was favourably impressed.

But I knew better by now than to show my feelings. Frowning heavily, I proceeded with deliberate malice to put the fear of God into those boys and keep it there. I used often to *act* a

violent loss of temper, beginning with low rumbles and working up to appalling overhead peals, on the model of the autumn storms occurring at about that time. I would command a delinquent to stand out from the body of the class, and then, forming my style after an old form-master of my own, I regularly let go at his head, until a deathly silence applauded my histrionic efforts, broken only by the bleats and shudders of the victim. After one or two of these displays the students grew afraid to enter my class-room (labelled 'Philosophia !'), and an ambassador from the previous course was sent to me, an intelligent youth I had not disliked, who said that, while he knew that himself and his classmates were to blame for these meteorological disturbances, still would I please find it in my heart to reassure the students, who at present were losing flesh for fear of me ! I made no promises ; but, having by this means established a reserve-force, I gradually mollified my behaviour.

All this was done on principle and in ordinary self-defence. Losing one's temper, whether genuinely or histrionically, is an exhausting business in a hot climate. As a rule, I was laughing inwardly to think how my old form-master would have chuckled, could he have been present, to hear his own bottled thunder so convincingly rebottled. The method was successful for a time ; but, as the Sirocco gradually wore one down and as the students became assimilated to the place, I began again to have trouble. In the last resort there was really no sanction behind one's attempts at discipline ; the students soon got to know that, and that the university authorities would put up with almost anything sooner than incur

the wrath of politicians by using the reprisals theoretically at their disposal.

None the less, I look back upon the boys of that second course with real affection, and I like to believe that I may really have done *something* to influence them 'in the right direction'. They were certainly not fond of work, or at all keen on the subject; their attention soon wandered in class, and they were studying, most of them, solely with a view to passing examinations: but they were good, affectionate fellows, and capable here and there of a squib of real independent intelligence. To encourage them to develop their own opinions, I turned one hour a week into a free discussion; and this fired some of them with the idea of a Debating Society, holding weekly debates alternately in English and Italian, with myself and an Italian-speaking professor for joint-presidents. It is highly characteristic of the Maltese student that the aim of this Society was not pure amusement and the exchange of ideas, but a desire to practise the two languages under supervision.

Alas, the Debating Society soon fizzled out! It could not compete with the joys of Strada Reale and the excitements of elections. The professor of Italian (an Italian) damped their ardour and hurt their feelings by saying that, as they had no ideas, what were they to debate about? . . . And though the services of the professor of Philosophy (an exceedingly able Maltese Carmelite friar) were ultimately secured for the Italian debates, he was always when it came to the point too busy to attend. As for me, I presided over half a dozen debates, but none was a real success. The debaters would all talk at once, and get

purple in the face under the strain of finding vent in English for the fierce swirl of their dialectic. One goblin-faced youth, I remember, came so near apoplexy through abortive indignation that I gave him the chair's permission, for once, to address the meeting in Maltese ; whereupon he skipped upon a desk and let forth such a flood of eloquence that the debate dissolved in laughter. Their idea of a debate was a number of simultaneous private wrangles, wherein the dialecticians had more the appearance of prize-fighters ! The whole thing soon wore itself out, and its half-dozen or so of meetings was only productive of a better understanding between me and them. Even so, it was well worth while ; and I recall a pleasing occasion just before Christmas, when I was made the object of a flattering address of thanks, to which I suitably replied, and for a while we all liked one another very much.

But the trouble, as ever, was the incessant examinations. No tigress despoiled of her young was ever fiercer than the Maltese student in doubt for his 'career'. What is more, their pitiable nervousness on these hateful occasions not only prevented their doing their best, but was actually distressing to witness. Sweat stood in beads on brows, physical anguish gave a pinch to noses, and a perpetual fire of foolish questions was maintained—with the sole object, as I realised, of getting into some sort of ordinary human touch with the dread neutral figures of the examiners. One or two of my examiners at different times were of slightly *farouche* appearance, and before these the legs of the wretched examinees became positively spiral ! No dog expecting a whipping ever crawled more abjectly, and they looked

around for my more familiar figure as for their best friend. I used to feel very sorry for them, for God knows what examinations ever were to me! But afterwards, when the papers came up to be read, one was often disgusted with the evidence of their inattention and colossal self-conceit. The most abject dunces would cheerfully put in for honours, and be outraged when they secured (if they did) a bare pass! It was always so with the Maltese student: he touched the heart with his real pathos and hardened it with his conceit.

It is very difficult for an Englishman, even if in England he has thought himself a Roman Catholic, to get used to the ways of Roman Catholic countries. All sorts of puerile ecclesiastical restrictions, which go for nothing in England, in Malta are hard and ineluctable facts. How often have I suggested to the brighter spirits of my class that they should read such and such a book, only to be abashed by the answer in full chorus—‘On the Index, sir!’ *Roma locuta est, causa finita est!* There was nothing more to be said! Heaven knows what trouble I should have got into if the rumour had ever gone about that an Englishman was undermining the catholic faith of ‘our poor students’! In Malta, at the public library, certain books and categories of books are behind grillès, locked in; and no Maltese student could get one out without (I believe) a written permission signed on behalf of the Archbishop. How admirable, how salutary, English catholics will exclaim! Well, well—perhaps!

Greatly daring, I put down on my syllabus Macaulay’s Essay on Ranke’s History of the Popes: should there have been any outcry, I

had the answer ready that in England this work has actually been issued as a Roman Catholic tract, owing to the author's admission that the Church is probably the most efficient institution the world has ever known. The Essay, 'as every schoolboy knows,' is mainly a summary, in Macaulay's vigorous and picturesque style of the history of the papacy. It was curious to watch the brighter spirits in the class catching fire as one by one the papal worthies defiled before them. When it came to the 'Crusade' against the Albigenses of Provence and Languedoc, engineered and indulged from Rome and inflamed on the spot by Dominic and his friars, up jumps a flushed student "But, sir," he stammers, "that wasn't Christianity — it — it was sheer Mohammedanism!" Murmurs of indignant dissent arising from the *bien-pensants* around, I had to pour oil on the flurrying waters by a disquisition on the ideas and theories underlying the policy of the age.

This incident seemed to me to show pretty clearly what is the real purpose of the 'Index' It is to save the clergy trouble. There is nothing in the history of the church, except its infallibility, which cannot be plausibly enough explained, but it is troublesome to have to explain things to the young. How much simpler to put all controversial books on the 'Index' and make it a 'mortal sin' to read them without special permission. What does this amount to in effect, except that a clerical system takes these boys' talents from them and buries them in the earth, lest the Lord, returning, be angry at their use of them? Is the Lord ever angry at a genuine *use* of a talent? He were a poor sort of Lord, if so.

People may argue as they please, but in my experience it remains a fact that the human intelligence cannot develop out of childishness (not *childlikeness*—a very different thing !) unless it be given perfect freedom to go its own way and make its own mistakes. The most unselfish form of parental love is that which is willing to let children make their own mistakes and, to a proper extent, suffer the consequences of those mistakes. We have the analogy of very little children : they *must* be left, at whatever cost of parental anxiety, to find their own feet and rue their own falls. So with the adolescent, he must be allowed to find his own mental balance. No priest nor professor nor fond parent even has the right to do more than strive to win affection, and therefore confidence, and therefore influence. Whatever is more than this—be the intention what it may—is a bad influence. As Dean Inge so excellently asks, what right have we to assume that God is an exclusively moral being, with no regard but for the negatives of man's life, taking no pleasure or interest in the human exercise of those positive faculties—reason, imagination, experiment—wherewith the spirit of man is so plentifully and nobly endowed ?

These students of mine were for the most part just great children : good, affectionate fellows—many having real capacity ; but their virile intelligence still in embryo because of the Index, the Confessional, and the general stale atmosphere of taking all things on trust.

This is my opinion, formulated three years later upon experience and reflection. Against it may be usefully set the testimony of an English Roman Catholic friend of mine—a man of long educational experience. “Remember,” he said

to me, " that you are dealing with the South. An Index, etc., is necessary there. These Maltese boys are not like ours ; they would believe all they read."

There may indeed be a mental state which requires an Index, but this state, in my belief, is brought about precisely by the Index. If Maltese boys believe all they read, it is because they may read so little—and that little such emasculate-stuff. Our boys know where to apply the pinch of salt because they are forever doing it. If this practice were forbidden them, they would become as mentally unbraced as the Maltese. It is exercise that strengthens the critical faculty, as it is exercise that strengthens every faculty. We are to *become*, not *remain*, as little children. I have that opinion of the Maltese that I believe their intelligence would react to freedom as ours does. . . . If not, then why did the mandarins of government grant this people self-government ? Maltese boys and girls who really cherished their catholic faith would soon develop the discretionary instinct ; and, if some did not, what a small price to pay for the all-round improvement ! Institute an Index, and you create a mentality which requires one.

A dear nun of my acquaintance told a Maltese girl not to read the works of George Eliot ! This, not surely because the books are harmful in themselves, but because the genius which created them lived an irregularly married life ! Even the Congregation of the Index has not, so far as I know, condemned these beautiful and spiritual works ; and, as the girl was my pupil for matriculation, I bade her read the lot. The female character which can be anything but braced by such examples as

Maggie Tulliver and Dinah Morris must be past praying for indeed !

I once had to review in Malta a *brochure* by a Jesuit priest giving advice to young catholics of the working classes as to what and how to read. I say it with regret, but a sillier tract was never written. It consisted of a long series of 'Thou shalt nots', and left one with the impression that the young catholic of the working classes would be much better advised not to undertake the hazardous enterprise of reading at all. Only catholic tracts, catholic apologetics, and stories (with a catholic moral) published by the Catholic Truth Society, were down on the list suggested. And especially and with fervour did this priest insist that no book was ever on any account to be admitted to a catholic household which might cause an inmate to feel disrespect for the clergy. That poor clergy ! How very, very vulnerable it must feel itself to be !

So far as my experience in catholic Malta goes, I can sum up my conclusions in a very few words. And it should be remembered that I went to Malta a catholic, even an ardent one, and certainly not expecting to find myself in strenuous disagreement with catholic institutions. The views I came to hold were forced upon me by degrees, and I accepted each at long last with reluctance. Malta is hot stuff, not only climatically, and it sweated certain beliefs out of me.

People must be left alone beyond a point to work out their own salvation for themselves. There is no distinguishing between the soul which is to be saved for heaven and the soul which may be smothered dead on earth. It is as *wicked* to stifle the mind as to give scandal to the soul ; and it

were as well for them that do the former, as for them that do the latter, that a mill-stone were hanged around their necks and they were drowned in the depths of the sea. People must be left alone.

English catholics have said to me since I returned, "Pooh, it was only the Maltese!" A more ignorant, a less charitable thing was never said. The Maltese are a people of fine parts, and the effects of the catholic faith may be as well studied among them as elsewhere. The catholic is not the only faith which has these effects, but it is the only one which makes a principle of them. I prefer however the real thing in Malta with all its faults, to the doctrinaire and discreditable defence of it in certain circles at home.

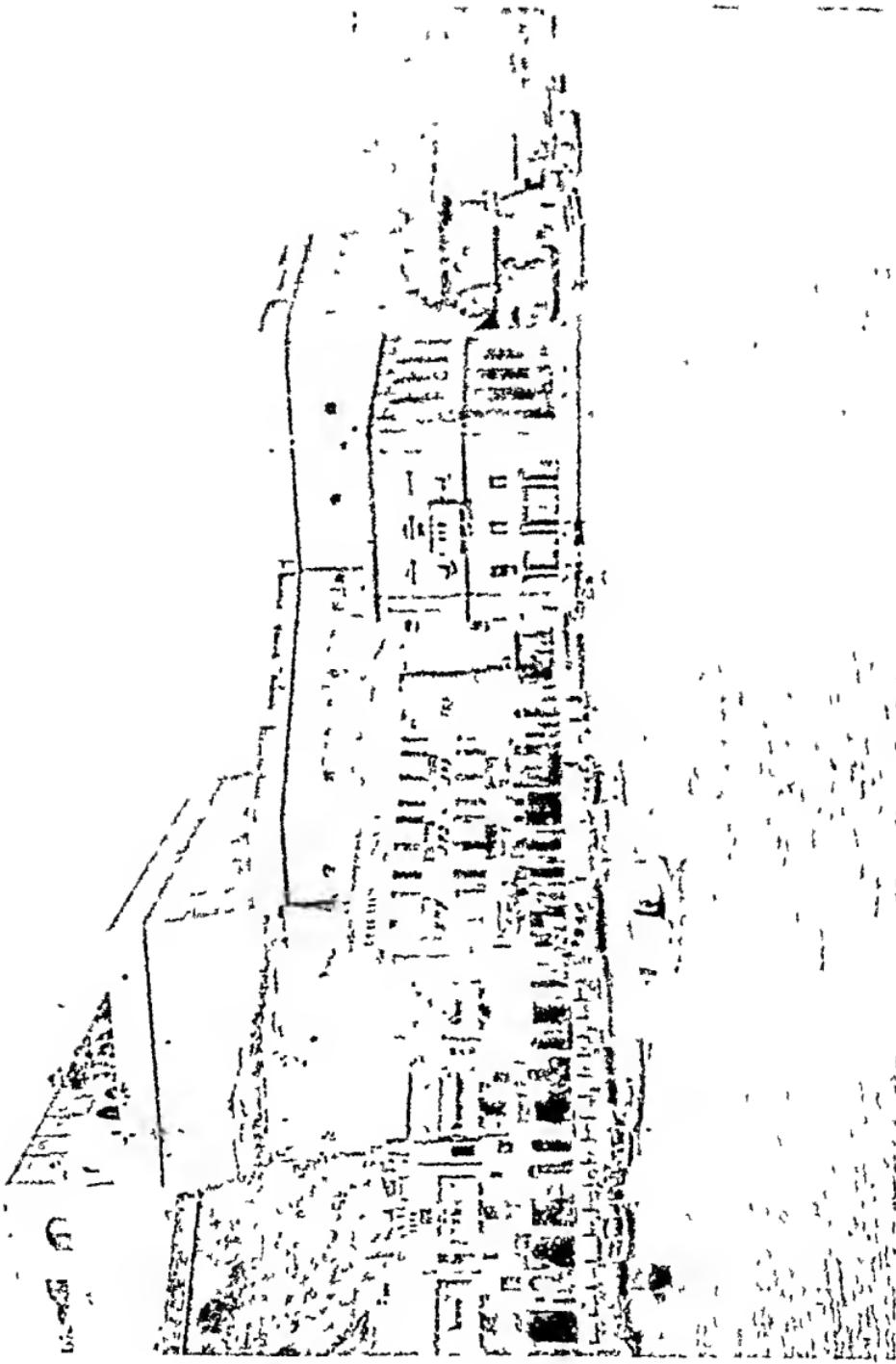
CHAPTER XI

A READING IN AND A SPEAKING OUT

TWO or three days after our arrival in Malta, while I was as yet blissfully ignorant of all that is contained in the preceding chapter, a letter came from the Registrar and Secretary of the University, intimating that it was customary for an incoming professor to "read himself in" to his chair by the delivery of a lecture *coram publico* in the Aula Magna of the University on some day before the beginning of the autumn term. The subject might be anything relevant to the profession of the chair. It was hoped that H.E. would preside, and that a "large and representative gathering" would form the audience. Would I therefore prepare such an address, and be good enough to acquaint "my obedient servant" with the title thereof, for announcement in the Press.

Now, upheavals such as leaving England for Malta, together with a host of unassimilated new impressions, do not dispose the mind to literary composition; nor is it at all easy to prepare what is to serve as a taste of one's quality before a "large and representative gathering", when the thermometer stands at wholly unfamiliar heights, and the Sirocco reduces one to a condition not far removed from Crashaw's description of the weeping Magdalene:—

HOW SWEET IT IS FORTIFIED



“A walking bath, a weeping motion.
A portable and compendious ocean.”

However, I set to work.

Or rather I devoted several hours each day, in the intervals of house-hunting, to sitting in a chair with a note-book in front of me, sweating pints! My fountain-pen, overcome by the Sirocco, was repeatedly sick over the page; and my hand was so wet that its slightest contact with the paper reduced the latter to a morass in a small way. I have read in the late Captain Scott’s ‘Voyage of the *Discovery*’ of the difficulties encountered by a diarist in the antarctic: how his breath is apt to freeze on the page, forming a film of ice there for the pencil to skid over. My difficulties were hardly less: the paper sodden under the hand, and the pen digging its nose through and writing on the page beneath.

But I struggled on. I was still under illusions about my job, and wanted to give a good account of myself before H.E. and the representative gathering. I cannot remember the title of my address, but I know it dealt “boldly” (I had no idea I was being bold) with the effects of language and literature on character. I fear I put in much fulsome flattery of the Maltese, after the manner of strangers seeking to propitiate in a foreign environment. Knowing nothing whatever about them, I of course fell back on their “well-known” qualities; saying all the things which I knew would please.

I am a good deal ashamed now when I reflect that I gave further currency in that address to several popular Maltese legends. For instance, the Maltese will tell you that they were “never

conquered", but chose of their own free-will to come under the British Crown. This has always seemed to me an entirely meaningless boast: one does not of course "conquer" an island of such a size, one simply occupies it. The truth simply is that, knowing somebody must protect them, and in terror of being handed back to the effete rule of the Knights, the Maltese themselves made choice of what was in every respect the best alternative, and, in view of the strategic position of the island, the most likely. There was no thought then of the neighbouring peninsula—they had had more than enough of that association; there was no talk of 'cultural affinities'. Annexed by some power they knew they must be, so they asked to be annexed by Great Britain, and thought themselves lucky (as they certainly were) when this was conceded them. The story is a natural and a creditable one, showing Maltese intelligence in a favourable light; but there is nothing, surely, very heroic or glorious about it.

However, we British have nothing but our own stupidity to thank if a generation of Maltese is now growing up which passionately cherishes this foolish story. It was we ourselves, I understand, who first put that gloss upon the facts, and it has latterly considerably affected the trend of Maltese politics. If the Maltese were to flatter themselves, rather, on having preserved some semblance of racial and national identity, in spite of constant conquests, absorptions, occupations and handings about as a gift, there would be more sense in it: but this would involve pride in their national language (Maltese), which, as things are, most of the intelligentsia are inclined to look down upon—from the heights of a rather dubious Italian.

Another tedious tale which is told in Malta, is, that the Maltese defeated the Turks at the time of the Great Siege. History of course attributes this feat to the Knights of St. John, but the Maltese argue that, though contemporary records are silent as to the part played by the Maltese, it stands to reason that they must have helped a great deal. But does it ? The Maltese are for the most part a very unmilitary people, but a very religious ; I should suppose that their main contribution to the great defence was the spiritual one of constant religious exercises in the churches, and a formidable ringing of bells whenever the fortunes of war afforded the least warrant for it.

However, to return from these digressions to my inaugural lecture, it got composed somehow—and delivered. The event fell upon the worst Sirocco day of the autumn season ; one could hardly breathe, let alone talk. Waiting in the university office beforehand, I was rolled heavily in upon by divers dreary persons who came to introduce themselves, and to tell me that it was very unfortunate, but in such weather there would be no audience—no audience at all ! *They* had come, they said, impelled by a sense of public duty, but it was not to be looked for that others would do likewise. I rather thought this myself, but I loved them none the more for their devotion to duty.

The Registrar and his assistants tied me up in a borrowed doctor's gown, a sumptuous affair of heavy silk with complicated sleeves ; and, so trussed, I made a nervous appearance in the Aula Magna—a large hall used for examinations and such public functions as the present, and adorned with Greek statuary (upon which the students

hung their hats) and hundreds of portraits of mixed legal and ecclesiastical luminaries of time past.

As it happened, my Job's comforters were wrong. In spite of the Sirocco, the hall was entirely filled with English and Maltese; and, H.E. being absent in Sicily on short leave, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor occupied the gilt-and-plush chair. My part of the show was not very competently stage-managed: unintroduced, I made for the only elevation in sight, and, horribly encumbered with that gown, plunged *in medias res*.

That address was, I think, the one unqualified success of three years in Malta. It aimed at being amusing rather than instructing, and the audience seemed to enjoy it. The listeners had come—mainly out of curiosity, to see what I was like—expecting something solid and dull; and they much appreciated their disappointment. Many people came to say agreeable things afterwards, and, best of all, the President of the Students' Union came, to shake hands very warmly, and utter with obvious sincerity his high and confident hopes of my success with the students.

It was a mistake on his part, but a generous one. He is incapable of anything but generosity. He himself had long since passed through his 'Arts' course, where I ministered, and was already far advanced on his way to the bar; had he been a student of mine, my early experiences might have been very different. For he was immensely powerful with the students. A pleasanter, a cleverer fellow does not exist; were all the students of his calibre, Malta University, in spite of its political entanglements, were a good place for any man.

And here, as in the case of the Rector, I shall



CARMELO MIFSUD BONNICI

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introduce the President of the Students' Union by name, as Mr. (he would probably prefer 'Signor') Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, one of the most really cultured Maltese I met. It is nothing to me that he is (at any rate, was) Italianist to the finger-tips, that he was the most able lieutenant of the foremost political protagonist of Italianism, and that all his 'cultural affinities' lay with the language and literature of Italy. All I care about is that he had a real love and understanding of good literature, that he was a poet on Italian models himself, that he was without prejudice, fundamentally humorous, and did not allow his politics to make an ass of him. Indeed, he always struck me as treating his politics as a bit of a 'rag,' and finding them as funny as I did. He had an immense fund of the highest spirits; and, while he had been the whole brain and life of the famous students' Riot, he was almost the only one whose head had not been in the least affected by its success. But nothing could spoil a man of his temperament; he is too fat (I beg his pardon), too kindly, humorous and sincere. He knew the whole performance had been ridiculous, but it had tickled him enormously, and, Falstaffian-wise, that was enough for him. How he used to chuckle over the photographs he showed me of it—with himself on top of a carozzi, or crowning a pyramid of students, of course in full spout of eloquence. When it came to a snap of himself taken in the act of going solemnly in to negotiate with the Chief Commissioner of Police, he was seized, like Tony Weller, with a very apoplexy of mirth. He was the one man of his age I met in Malta who could sustain a conversation having nothing to do with the island, and he was the

only one who really loved literature for its own sole sake.

This original student ran a paper among other things: not just a students' affair, but a genuine review—quite some of the best reading in the island, wherein the British came by some hard knocks. Never shall I forget its editor's face when he showed me some satirical verses of his own composition, from which some one in the Lieutenant Governor's office had solemnly excised a stanza! It was perhaps the proudest moment of the author's life—as, I should hope, it was the least proud in that of the official responsible. But my impression uniformly was that some part of this good fellow's politics was owing to a certain very understandable pleasure in feeling himself out against the cautionary display of military gold-lace and stars and crowns which Valletta glitters withal. A Maltese youth, conscious of exceptional parts, might well fall foul of the somewhat imperial manners of some officers.

When I first knew Carmelo Bonnici, he was hoping to be nominated to the first Maltese Rhodes Scholarship, then about to be assigned. Needless to say, in my opinion he could establish ten times the claim to it of any other student in Malta. Does not the Bequest expressly stipulate that beneficiaries shall be of exceptional personality and of marked 'capacity for leadership'? What is more, Bonnici, with his real culture and wide interests, was just the man to profit by and enjoy a year or two at Oxford. He would have acted and reacted, just as Rhodes designed; influenced and been influenced; he would have made Malta known for what Malta is—a nation in some respects unique in Europe. But, alas, he was found to

be 'over age'—and this, of course, could not possibly be got round ; he was also an Italianist of the first water—which, surely, was another reason for sending him to England ; and, in short, his claims were passed over, and the scholarship granted to a youth whose parents were intending in any case to send him to Oxford.

But if this able and impressionable young man had been sent to Oxford, does anybody suppose that his prejudice against England would have survived the experience ? He would have come back to Malta to do what in any case he will some day do—that is, run the island ; but he would have known us as we are in our own country, not as we too generally appear in Malta with our gold-lace and crowns. He would have made a host of English friends and got a higher view of English culture, and he would have returned to Malta with 'cultural affinities' in two places, which is exactly what Malta requires.

However

He just didn't get the thing : and a man who is bound to loom large in Malta's future was denied a great opportunity.

When I condoled with him afterwards, and expressed the astonishment I felt, he put his hand on my arm and said, with a hint of something I thought pathetic in his voice :—

" Ah, you do not yet know Malta ! "

Latterly, to my regret, I saw less and less of Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, who, after leaving the university, and with the advent of Malta's self-government, grew more and more immersed in politics. D'Annunzio and Carducci gave place to wild electioneering campaigns in Gozo, and

poetry to outpourings of stump oratory. But whenever I caught sight of him in the street, he was always shaking his Falstaffian sides with laughter, and I used to say to myself, "There goes the only man in Malta who flavours his politics with a saving pinch of salt!"

Laugh and grow fat! Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici does both; and, when he is Prime Minister of Malta, he will still be laughing. He will never be too awfully solemn; and the Maltese, a singularly sweet-natured people when not soured by politics, will love him for it.

Let him only be (not *too* Italianist and D'Annunzian (for the clergy may get on his track!)), and it is my convinced belief he will some day make just the statesman Malta needs.

CHAPTER XII

'THE ANIMALS WENT IN THREE BY THREE.'

AFURNISHED house was the next thing to be obtained ; and, with this end in view, we suffered ourselves to be delivered over into the toils of a ferocious, bristly old house-agent.

That man ! Never, certainly, shall we forget him ! Or the back view of his white ' bags ' (they were indeed *bags* !) as we sweated round and round Sliema in his stormy wake ! He wore a straw hat of antique design on his head, and in his hand or under his arm he carried *Mrs. Gamp's very own umbrella* !

House after house he showed us, and house after house we turned down : to his gathering wrath and scorn. " You like this nice house ? No ? You *not* like this nice house ! What you want ? This *very* nice house ! "

There was one house in particular—one commanding an "uninterrupted view of over the way", and furnished *à la mode* to look as much as possible like the inside of a removals-van : of unique unattractiveness—which he was determined we should have. This, he declared, was a **VERY** nice house, JUST what we wanted : it had been occupied by a naval officer, who had loved it ecstatically, but, alas ! at the call of duty, he had had to leave it ! Here the house-agent's voice

quite broke. To leave that lovely house, so full, full of furniture ! Oh, it was beyond all words ! But it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good, and here this lovely house was, all ready for us !

We, after a look over that 'lovely house', disbelieved in the naval officer—at any rate, in his regretting the call of duty ! But, when we finally declined to live in it, such was the chagrin of its champion, I fully expected to feel the ribs of Mrs. Gamp's umbrella in *my* ribs.

It was sheer physical exhaustion, combined with craven terror of the house-agent, that wore out our resistance at length. We had toiled the whole extent of the Sliema esplanade (on a Sirocco evening) to see a house, concerning which the house-agent warned us, that, if we turned up our nose at this one, he would wash his hands of us for ever. Did no guardian-angel in catholic Malta whisper in our ear ? If any did, the house-agent thundered in the other ! Guardian-angels must speak up, or never hope to prevail against such agents ! We took the house ! At least, it had a beautiful view : towards the Dragonara Palace, across St. Julian's Bay, the waters whereof are the colour of opals in the early morning, of deep sapphires at noon, and all ambered in the evening glow of the sun.

For reasons which there were we were always up to see the sun rise. We became painfully familiar with the opals of Malta's southern dawn.

The landlord smiled and smiled, had about a dozen children, and a wife who spoke no English. A daughter however was more accomplished, and assured us (significant words !) that her mother was "very careful". You have to be "very careful"

in a hot summer climate like that of Malta, for the enemy is abroad and will enter the ark if he can. Everywhere around the Mediterranean seaboard it is the same; and the wonder rather is, not that accidents happen, but that on the whole they happen so seldom. The slightest carelessness, the least remission of watchfulness, and you may easily be 'for it'. The foe may have nestled up to you in church, or come home, like Falstaff, in the washing—may have risen with you off some public seat, or 'lurked' you from the curtains of a carozzi; but it will matter little how he came when he comes, for, when he comes, he is invariably *she*, and

We took that house—if not wholly without misgivings, yet with confidence restored. And verily we had our reward: the house-agent actually smiled upon us!

We moved in the day after the family departed thence. But—how to express it?—they had left certain small stray items behind them! We kept on finding these trifles (or they us!) all through the first evening. I remember I undressed to the skin three times in as many hours!

The kitchen, our newly-acquired treasure informed us with a shrug, was alive with cockroaches, which leapt off high ledges into the soup. But what of that? A cockroach adds body and flavour to soup. Mice squeaked and bickered around us as we sat at dinner, peering at our strangeness with black beads of eyes. But what is a mouse? Company!

We sat that evening, I well remember, for a long time out on the balcony enjoying the cooler air, feeling very romantic and fond of one another, and pleased with our house, which was the first

we had had together in what already seemed, owing to its congested events, our long married life of barely three weeks. Night came down over calm St. Julian's Bay, and we watched the lamps wavering in the dark waters. It was late when we went to bed.

The rest is silence !

“ There was a sound of revelry by night
. . . . The Foe ! They come, they come ! ”

Night's ' sweet child, Sleep, the filmy-eyed ' did not visit us, and we had arisen a long time before we ' saw the dawn ' .

“ Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
Last eve in (bedclothes) circle proudly gay,
The midnight brought the signal sound of
strife,
The morn the marshalling in arms—the
day. . . . ”

Et cetera !

The dawn rose slowly over calm St. Julian's Bay, kissing the drowsy waters into smiles, a mother of pearl. Morning came, and the cheerful sounds thereof.

“ Ah, then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of
distress,
And cheeks all pale ”

Our landlord, for whom we sent, kept on smiling, albeit apologetically. His own family, he confessed, had known a little trouble, but were under the impression they had dealt with it. He referred, no doubt, to the faint sprinkling of a certain famous powder which we had remarked

with apprehension upon the mattress-frames! It was most unfortunate, our landlord said—nor did we contradict him: it had never occurred before in a house of his; he was very sorry. His wife had wept her eyes out on hearing of it. We, like the soft-hearted fools we were, felt touched at this, and sent consolatory messages to the lady—whose plight, after all, was less dire than ours, in that she had at least a bed where to betake her grief; but, as our circumstances grew more desperate, we ceased to have pity to spare from ourselves, and, had we sent again, should have done so in the words of the dying Russian soldier to his betrothed, in Poushkin's poem:—

“ Let her weep a little while,
It will do her no harm ! ”

It amuses me to recall that the ear to which I confided this state of things was that of no less than His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor. What so exalted an official might be supposed to care in the matter, it is hard now to say; but by this time, after a week of no beds to sleep in, my sense of outrage was such that I rather wonder I did not communicate with the Colonial Office! Anyhow, we had dined with his Honour, and it had been friendly. It was no less friendly now.

From His Honour the matter was referred to the Chief of the Public Health Department, who promised to send round an inspector, and was as good as his word. The inspector duly arrived, and poked the beds with a very smart cane, as though it were at any rate worth trying whether the cane were a wand and had magic properties. Disappointed in this expedient, the inspector sighed, shook his head, and went away.

We got out of the trouble finally only by getting out of the house.

I have said that the landlord smiled and smiled! Later, that house was let again! Not for lack of warning however did this naval captain take the fatal step; I happen to know that he was cautioned. But he was 'breezy', as these sea-dogs are so apt to be; and "Pooh!" said he, "I've known this island off and on for twelve years. Why, the landlord himself has been living in the house!" So he took the house, and moved in with his wife and young family; and some friends of ours, who lived next door, awaited developments. They had not to wait long! That very next morning all the bedding was discovered out in the road, hurled there apparently by some awakened sleeper in his agony; and in the afternoon the gallant captain left, and his family with him, and the place knew them no more.

Yet once again the house was let! But this tenant, and his wife also, had newly come from Constantinople; and, while they admitted a 'certain liveliness' from time to time in bed,— "Oh, after Constant., not worth mentioning!"

Our first experience of house-taking in Malta, as here related, is far from being offered as typical. We had several other houses in the island, but never again the same trouble; I do not think we could have borne it again. This narrative is a personal account of what did in fact befall ourselves in Malta, but, if I were asked to give a word of general advice to others, it would be, for Malta as for all around the Mediterranean, 'Beware, take care!'

From houses to servants is a natural step, and we may well take it at this point.

Our first venture was one Teresa—rounded up for us (probably by dint of the umbrella !) by the terrible old house-agent. Teresa was strong and grim, with the quiet obstinacy of a donkey and the tread of a London policeman. She was a typical Maltese peasant woman, with jet-black hair and eyes, rubicund cheeks, and full bust. She conversed mainly by gesture and in off-hand monosyllable, could be relied upon to do *what* you told her but by no means *how* you told her, and went often to confession, where she put cases for our conscience as well as for her own to the ghostly comforter. Once her mistress told her it was wrong to believe in omens, and, further, that if she broke any more crockery she would have to pay for it: whereupon Teresa promptly went to confession. On her return she remarked that Mistress was quite right about the omens, but that the proposal to stop breakages out of wages had been denounced by the holy man as unquestionably the inspiration of the devil.

Indeed, Teresa was extremely pious, and it was over this aspect of her that we quarrelled. No doubt it is an excellent thing to devote some time every day to prayer and recollection, but not, perhaps, if it has pleased God to call one to the state of domestic service, always just at tea-time, when, to say nothing of tea being required itself, there is further a strong presumption of callers. But Teresa was always wrapt in prayer at this hour; re-appearing, in first-class spiritual form, when we had got the tea and admitted the callers. She had a little shrine in her bedroom, dedicated to some favourite saint, upon which we at first looked leniently, until the disappearance one by

one of all our small lamps forced us to protest. The saint, we had to tell Teresa, was only strictly entitled to one lamp, that set aside for his client's use, but we were prepared to let him down gently, with, say, two—one for each side of his picture. I do not know whether Teresa went to confession about this, but she turned very sulky; and it may have been owing to fatherly counsels that she soon afterwards experienced a vocation to go next door but one.

After Teresa, we felt a hankering for something rather more biddable and less addicted to the consolations of religion. We were a bit tired of Carmelite moral theology transmitted through our handmaiden, and the result of this carnal reaction was a small damsel of only fourteen, by name Adelina.

Adelina was willing, cheerful and pretty; her piety (what we saw of it) limited to sonorous ejaculations—"Santissima Maria!" She laid a table by piling all the cutlery in the centre of the table and arranging the dishes precariously on the extreme edge. When the inconvenience of this method was explained to her, she showed faultless teeth in the broadest smile, and, invoking the Virgin in rolling superlatives, dispersed the forks and spoons all over the table and set the soup-tureen immediately under my nose like a civic presentation.

Adelina's drawback was nervousness at being left alone in the house at night, which made it impossible for us to go out unless we took her too. Once, when we had gone in next door, there came a ring at the bell towards eleven o'clock, and a frightened little voice whispered to our host, "Please, sir, but is my gentleman here?"

Adelina herself found the solution of this problem. One day she asked permission to go home, whence she returned anon with a family deputation which had come to tell us that, as Adelina was terrified of sleeping alone, would we very kindly allow a little sister (little sister produced at this point from under a faldetta) to come and keep her company at night? We had no objection at all, and the deputation withdrew in a fine display of teeth ; leaving the fat little sister perched on a chair in a remote corner of the kitchen. It was the funniest sight to see those two children at table together in the candle-light of the kitchen ; it was cheerful to hear their laughter, and touching to catch sight of them in bed through the wide-open door, locked in one another's arms, sleeping profoundly, their pig-tailed heads indistinguishable on the pillow.

Elsidia, or the little sister, soon became a fixture in the house. She and Adelina laid the table with much conversation in Maltese and suppressed giggles, according to more and more startling concepts of their joint genius ; and, in the early afternoon, when they were not wanted in the house, they would retire to a goat-infested wilderness at the back in order to play ball. We were reproved more than once for turning our kitchen into a nursery, but we liked the two children, and found their laughter cheerful in the house, their quaint ways a diversion. When we left the house, they mobilised such an array of supernumerary sisters and female cousins that our hustled packing got done in record time.

Mary, the next, who served us at our flat in Valletta, was a stout and matronly figure who disliked stairs ; wherefore, as there were sixty-six

steep ones up to our abode, she always brought a little sprite of a daughter, by name Stella, to act as aide. Mary did not sleep in ; her bulk would almost have forbidden it, even had she had no husband and family elsewhere : as it was, she fitted the tiny kitchen as an egg fills an egg-cup. The trouble was that her maternal yearnings after this family in far St. Julian's across the water, obliged us to have dinner almost immediately after tea. As meek as boiled milk to us, to her fellow-servants on the stairs she was a perfect dragon, despising their shrill gossip from floor to floor and denouncing their giddy virginity. Once, when we had painters in, Mary so trod on the poor men, that, almost in tears, they fled to us for protection And a week later, as Mary informed us with ill-concealed triumph, the foreman died—at a ripe old age, it is true,—but I have often uneasily wondered whether his end was at all hastened by the bruising of his spirit by old Mary.

Old Mary was a cook : which is another way of saying she was no housemaid ! She was however quite the most marvellous flea-catcher I have ever known : not the liveliest flea stood one chance in a thousand against her more nimble fingers. I, to whom a flea will come if it has to board a travelling bus to do so, forgave her much on this account, for, in Malta's spring season, the world is very "full of fleas".

CHAPTER XIII

DOLORES

ONCE, when I was dining in a military mess in Malta, the conversation at table turned on the quality of servants in different parts of the Empire. A quiet captain, sitting near, told the story of a good one he had had in the Soudan; a major opposite, took up the running with one in China as much superior to the captain's as a crown is superior to three 'pips'; and finally the colonel went one 'pip' better with an authentic Indian yarn of the 'best boy that ever was, sir!' There being no general-officer in company, we stopped short at the colonel's paragon: who, I remember, had improved on Elijah's ravens to the tune of five-course dinners in the jungle, and on Moses by tapping rocks, not for mere water, but for whisky-and-soda!

Let the majors rage, and the colonels devise vain things. Be it mine to tell a plain tale of Dolores, a Maltese maid-of-all-work; whose virtues, if something of an anti-climax after the sorceries of fakirs acting as batmen, have yet perhaps more of the natural colour of life, and may appeal more strongly to such as still advertise (hope springing eternal in the human breast) for 'A good general servant, good plain cook, willing to do washing, fond of children'. We have known such a one, in Malta; indeed, she was *un-willing* *not* to do washing!

She came to us, as come all the best gifts of life, and likewise its hardest knocks,—without warning. More strictly, she did not come to us at all, but we went to her. It was six weeks after the birth of our baby, a Maltese June was wearing on, the heat of that summer climate becoming daily more intense ; a large, cool house with an enclosed garden of orange-trees was offered us at such altitude above Valletta as the island affords, and of this house 'Dolores' would be, if we so pleased, an adjunct. We knew of no special reason for pleasing ; we were but told, without particularity, that she was a good girl, intelligent, trustworthy, speaking English well, devoted to children. Heaven knows if we had heard the same tale before ! We accepted of Dolores, if gratefully enough, certainly without premonition of the intense personal grief which was to be ours at parting from her in the end.

On first arrival at our 'Villino' (how well I recall the fierce blaze of the day, the drifted dust of the long blanched road, the utter *pas de zèle* of one's emotions !) we found Dolores awaiting us in a cool green twilight of long high rooms, from which a tireless manipulation of tiresome sun-blinds had all day been vigilantly excluding the altering beams, where everything now invited to the spineless summer loungings of Northerners in this climate. Even after an hour and more on the merciless Maltese road in a carozzi, one could allow that the girl was comely ; and when, as shortly followed, our son passed naturally into her arms, and rested there, one perceived that the special quality of her looks was *Madonna*. If there was a certain critical detachment in her greeting of us, for our son there was an instant

softening and sweetening of her whole air into rapture. But it was a rapture entirely without words. It was just that, with her dark southern eyes full of an almost infinite response to the appeal of his helplessness, she forthwith took him, not into her arms alone, but right into her heart, and would, from that moment onwards, have died for him with as blithe an alacrity as that which never failed the least of his manifold needs.

But Dolores was deep water, and it was some time before we knew her really well. There was a deal of Kipling's cat in her nature--the 'Just So' cat, who 'walked by himself in the wild wet woods'; she hated observation beyond everything, and revelled in the aloofness which her sole servantship in our walled citadel afforded. She would have worked all night, as well as all day, sooner than accept help from without. There had been talk of an extra girl 'by the hour' to help cope with the extensive washing an infant entails; we had thought to relieve Dolores; but, with that characteristic set of the head which left the dictionary gasping for breath, she gave us to understand once and for all that nothing should induce her to relinquish one jot or tittle of her prerogative as (among other things) nurse. For in the original light of a 'prerogative' she regarded an infant's washing!

'Never mind, ma'am' and 'Don't worry, Sir'—these were ever her slogans, uttered *en passant* as she pelted off on soundless bare feet to achieve out of hand whatever had been under discussion. Proposal of extra wages she passed by with a shrug, and she was prejudiced against presents even; but, as we were to discover, she more than had her extra reward in an intense Puck-like

pleasure derived from baffling our swarming neighbours, whose eager curiosity as to us and the details of our domesticity filled her with derisive mirth. Secure in the sole possession of us and the knowledge of our affairs, such as they were, she found scope for a kittenish humour ; and it must have ministered to her sense of identity to move, demure and circumspect, among the pitcher-ears, her dancing eyes how evidently full of the undivulged particulars after which they strained.

Character, as it develops naturally apart from vulgarising influences, is a truly marvellous thing ; and one has reactionary moments of wondering if it be not better after all that a few should acquire for themselves the means of education, rather than all be given them as a matter of course. Just as a dog really relishes only the bone he discovers for himself, so I think most people only profit by what they have been at pains to obtain. Where opportunities occur but seldom, the smallest counts ; and where small things count, character, if it has been formed at all, will have been formed soundly.

All that Dolores knew (and she knew a great deal, and that thoroughly) had come to her in the way of small opportunities seized ; she had listened and overheard, questioned and observed ; and then, like Mary, she had stored up all these things in her heart, where they had fructified a hundredfold. Her mind was like a bird in its quick perception and adroit annexation of whatever would serve a need, and there was something bird-like too in the joy that came to her along the ordinary channels of workaday life. She might have sat to Wordsworth for a Maltese 'Ruth' ; and she was like another Ruth in the assiduity

of her gleanings on the wide field of knowledge, whereby even the most close-fisted Boaz must have been moved to 'let fall some ears on purpose'. She hungered and thirsted after knowledge, as saints have done after righteousness; and her hoard of it, if one could have seen into her mind, would have presented the appearance of a picture in mosaic—or a jig-saw puzzle after completion,—a whole consisting of innumerable tiny pieces, assembled by some clue of colour, and fitted in according to shape. Character is the cause, as it is likewise the result, of such a mental mosaic.

There was nothing of the dreamer about Dolores; her mind was intensely practical, its bias towards the ordinary feminine ends of life. Families are large in Malta, and the mortality among infants is simply appalling; babies come and babies go, according (as the poor mothers are told) to the 'Bambino's' inscrutable will. Now Dolores, more than once in her career, had watched English children brought on hygienic principles safely through the first year of life, and the thing had come upon her with the force of a revelation: the fate of little children was not, then, the haphazard affair it might seem, but nature had laid down laws, which laws could be known, and *must* be known, since disobedience to them meant death for the child. Not even the weakest child *need* die, but the strongest might, if ignorantly treated. Love, where infants are concerned, means *knowledge*.

From the moment that these truths dawned upon Dolores, she never ceased to expand her knowledge of them, pursuing them with all her bird-like quickness into every hole and corner,

every nook and cranny, of their furthest application ; reading the text-books, absorbing the principles, narrowly observing the methods proper to minor emergencies : and then, since she had the interests of her own sex and class very closely at heart, sallying forth into the neighbourhood, a regular prophet of infant hygiene. Alas, hers was the common experience, and she was a prophet very much without honour in her own country. But for her admirable sense of humour, she must often have been heavily depressed. To the slipshod, happy-go-lucky fatalism of the average Maltese peasant-woman, such wisdom as this was mere 'English' folly, savouring even (vaguely) of religious offence ; for (pathetic reasoning enough !) if the latest little Giuseppe or Carmela might have been saved by these negative counsels, what became of the 'Bambino's' will—to the pathless workings of which they were so often officially referred for consolation ? How should a mere boiling or diluting of milk hold off the 'Evil Eye' ? . . . And what is the sense of castor-oil for infants already relaxed to exhaustion ? Were they to take as truth from Dolores (a mere one of themselves) what they had laughed at for lies on the lips of a doctor ? Not all Dolores' harangues on hygiene, thrown off on her way to our marketing, moved the hearers to more than incredulous, not to say indignant, mutterings of 'Inglese !'

Cleanliness and godliness have parallel histories, and Moses had the measure of humanity when he combined the two under one stern sanction of divine law. If Dolores mourned over her failure, she might have rejoiced in the 'choir invisible' of her peers. But I do not think she did mourn much, for it was far from being her *métier*, and the

pathos of her gainsayers was hidden from her sight behind the earthworks of their more obvious stupidity. Never in my life have I met with a more buoyant creature than she, nor ever with one more happily engrossed in the affairs of the present hour. Cat-like in aloofness, bird-like in quickness of practical perception, she was like a child in her capacity for joy. I say 'joy' advisedly, rather than pleasure; for joy is of the spirit, pleasure of the flesh: and, indeed, a Frenchman has gone the length of declaring that pleasure is a mere interruption of joy, where the latter exists. Certainly, we all know that the one is no substitute for the other, or necessarily a giver of it; and in the life of Maltese peasants pleasures are a rare occurrence. The joy of Dolores was like the strong pulse of a mountain stream, whereof the force of the spring may be guessed from the flow of the waters; one is privileged to have lived by such a thing, and perhaps the wiser for knowing that this rarest and most heavenly grace may be the gift of a life of unrelieved domestic toil on a little-known island in the middle of the sea. The gain of such a nature in a nurse of little children needs no stressing, but the influence is not only felt by children; there is, thank God, a powerful contagion about happiness, and one can no more live near it unaffected than one can avoid the scent of flowers in a garden in spring. One can pay perhaps to have things well done in a house, but no money could purchase the sort of whole-hearted, generous, joyous service which the brave, good spirit of this woman invariably gave us.

In all the ordinary domestic offices Dolores was no less a treasure. She had her own methods,

like all characters, but the results were sound. Though the kitchen was a vaulted under-ground affair, reached corkscrew-wise by turret-steps of stone, and though all the cooking must be done by refractory oil-stoves, she served up meals which could be offered to a guest without embarrassment. She put that strong mind of hers into the cooking, and it tasted the better for the ingredient. Duster and scrubbing-brush in her hands were no mere emblems, and the cleanliness she saw to in the house was seen not less in her own personal habits, which were of a genuine natural refinement. I feel that I insult her almost in mentioning such things,—as I feel it even more strongly when I add that she was honest. She was not so much honest, as without thought of deception ; though she did all our marketing for us, and might easily, while remaining fair to us, have made a little for herself on the transactions, the thing was not in her, and she counted out pennies as scrupulously (and as indifferently) as she accounted for pounds. Both in the house and out of it, she was as mindful of our interests as we could be ourselves, and she was much more disposed than ever we were to take trouble over the smaller ones. It was, for example, a great matter with Dolores that no neighbour should guess why the doctor called, or why baby cried, or why 'Master' went out in a hurry. In our visitors she took a human and outspoken interest, referring always to each, not by name, but with respect to some personal feature, or thing said, that had struck her : as thus—"That fat man," "the man that always stays late," "the woman that says baby is so sweet," and so on.

Towards the numerous and deep-rooted super-

stitions of Maltese peasant-life Dolores preserved an attitude of 'honest doubt', which had yet as much faith in it as is commanded nowadays by most creeds. She did not believe in ghosts, but she was afraid of them. She would admit that the 'Evil Eye' was probably all 'my eye', but as surely would she have hung a charm round baby's neck if we had let her. On the average peasant, of course, no rational argument has the least effect; such talk is merely 'English'—and the English may well be immune, since, being all protestants (and probably free-masons), they are hardly worth the devil's while in this world! Dolores was far from being the average peasant, but she professed to have come across instances in her day which seemed to lend colour to the need of some precaution against the devil and his agents. When we laughed at her stories, she laughed at them too; but she remained unconvinced all the same, and was not at all tempted to attract remark to herself by any forthright neglect of this popular substitute for hygiene. For that is just what most superstitions are.

As for the hold which her religion proper had on her, and the part it consciously played in her life, I cannot presume to say: like all the Maltese, she performed the outward observances of the Roman Catholic faith with punctuality and perseverance, and (what is not nearly so common) had a considerable grasp of the meaning of these rites. But if sensible men do not say what their religion is, I suspect good women *cannot*. Dolores was no bigot. What the whole truth is, she would not have undertaken to say; but she certainly held that high principles, courage, humility, belief in the truth of beauty, and trust in the power of

good, are all essential to salvation, both in this world and the next.

During the whole of our nine months' tenancy of the 'Villino', Dolores remained our faithful servant and friend; nothing ever occurred to strain or even jar our happy relations, and we parted from her at length (it may be imagined with what regret) only because we were leaving the island for good. Malta is a hard place to get away from, and we had numerous transport disappointments. But they did not appear in that light to Dolores—quite the reverse! Never shall I forget the ecstatic kissings and dancings of baby with which she greeted the news of each further few days' grace. If it was a grief to her to part from us, from baby it was desolation; but it was part of the general childlikeness of her character (and indeed a thing mercifully common to simple peoples) that she could not bring it home to herself with any force that our happy association was to be broken up, until almost the very moment of goodbye.

We were not to sail until late in the evening, but went on board early for baby's sake, taking Dolores, at her own earnest request, with us. She had never in her life been on board a ship, and seemed to hanker after the experience—though I could not see, when it came to the point, that she had eyes for anything but baby, who went, as he had often gone before, wrapped in the folds of her faldetta. She came with us, large-eyed and very quiet, right down to the dismal little cabin which was the best our utmost arranging had been able to do for us; and there, for the last time—a little subdued, but still only half-realising—she undressed, bathed, and soothed off to sleep the

'DOLORES'—with the author's little boy
(She is wearing the Maltese female head-dress or 'faldetta')



child she so devotedly loved and had served so well. The dumping in of luggage did not upset her in the least, but she sat on the little couch giving baby his bottle, just as if he and she were safe at home in the long, quiet nursery together ; and she kept on singing her little Maltese lullaby, with not one note less tuneful for the polygot wranglings of porters and passengers in the passage outside. That little lullaby was still for a long time baby's best sedative, and a potent summoner of Dolores from the past.

Then, when baby had overcome his indignation at the strange surroundings, and was asleep, Dolores looked up. She seemed to see in our eyes, rather than hear us say, that the time had come—and she realised ! How she did realise ! For a while she was like a stricken thing, abject and shaken with sobs ; and her white face, looking back through the deepening night from the shoreward boat, haunted us for days like a sad ghost.

I saw the last of Dolores, for (man-like) I returned on shore, the ship not sailing yet, to dine. I took her with me up to Strada Reale in a carozzi. " Nobody will ever look after us again as you have done, Dolores," I said to her ; and she replied, with perfect sincerity, " Oh, sir, it's nothing ! "

She thought so, I don't doubt. She would. She probably really did think that no debt remained between us, once her wages were paid up to the end. What she said to me may indeed be true—in the simple truth of the heart, where love gives all, and all is nothing beside love. But my words to her need no such interpreting, for service has fallen into disrepute now all the world over, and one of the oldest human relationships is passing quickly away. In a distant place the

captain had found it, and the colonel too had found it in a distant place ; and it would seem one must go far afield, into the desert and the isles of the sea, to find the scattered seeds of the flowers of Eden.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ORDEAL AND AN AUDIENCE

WITHIN a week of our first arrival in Malta we were invited (or should it be, commanded?) by the Governor to dine with him at his summer palace of Verdala. Verdala is eight good miles and more from Valletta, so the A.D.C. had further to inform us over the telephone that a government car would take us there and back.

Many a king in these hard-up days is worse off for palaces than H.E. the Governor of Malta, who has three. Valletta is his winter residence, and there, too, he entertains on the *omnium gatherum* principle, music or dancing. At San Antonio he spends the off-seasons, giving garden-parties among the flowers and orange-groves of Malta's finest garden; and to Verdala he repairs for the dog-days, since this palace stands as high as you can get upon the island.

It is, as we came to know later, a handsome square-shaped palace of considerable height, surrounded by terraced gardens charmingly laid out, and commanding from all the main windows a magnificent view of the beautiful valley of Boschetto, an eastern pleasance of the Gethsemane type, luxuriating between sheltering cliffs of the tawny Maltese rock. From this palace's roof there is a prospect of almost the whole island; even Gozo is to be seen in the distance.

I remember Verdala, however, on this occasion of the 'command' visit, as nothing but an oasis of bright light in the midst of a pitch-black universe. The night was of exceptional darkness and profundity, the stars seeming to hang low in it ; there was no moon. One had the impression of passing countless ages in the car which took us out, though it was powerful and ran well, taking the sharp, narrow corners of the stone-built villages with what seemed a reckless audacity. These villages looked like weird cubist fancies as they flashed in and out of the great travelling arc of the head-lights ; and in the same fierce glare the dust-blanchéd oleanders and bushes beside the road haunted, each for a second, like ashen ghosts. They were as white as hoar-frost, but of a dead whiteness, without sparkle.

That was a notable drive—with an incongruous end ; for, on arrival at the palace, there, on the broad steps leading up to the doorway, stood H.E. and party, looking like a little stray bit of the London season cast away on a tiny island of light in a vast ocean of darkness.

There were more men than women at that dinner party, and on my right, in the lofty vault-shaped dining-room, I found an elderly Maltese of solemn appearance, who, I somehow gathered, was one of Malta's chief sanitary engineers. Knowing little of the island as yet, I found conversation with him hard ; but I led off on that side of me with a remark to the effect I had been pleasurabley struck with the general air of gaiety and well-being among the inhabitants of Valletta and the villages : so different, I said, from the strained, bloodshot eyes of our own people in the industrial centres of northern England. "Ah," said he, "if the people

appear unhappy, the drainage system must certainly be at fault!" On the contrary, I said . . . It was probably super-excellent; but an efficient drainage system hardly in itself constituted felicity. "If the people appear unhappy," he reiterated, "the drainage system must be bad!" I fear I did but leave him with the impression that such English cities as Manchester and Leeds are scandalously behindhand from a sanitary point of view.

In the drawing-room afterwards H.E. took a hand at bridge, while the rest of us sat down to a game called 'Pelman'. I do not shine at card-games—am, in fact, an almighty fool at one and all of them; and 'Pelman' struck me then, and has remained on my mind ever since, as quite the hardest over which I was ever compelled to make an exhibition of myself. It depends entirely upon the memory, as the name suggests, and as, where cards are concerned, I have none, I could feel myself sinking lower and lower in the estimation of all around. The title of 'professor' has its drawbacks. Two things only upheld me: one, that my wife was piling up 'pairs' in fine style at her end of the table, and, two, that an admiral seated beside me was a mere fractional point less hopeless than myself. Neither of us could secure a single 'pair'; and when at last the admiral—by mistake, I am thoroughly convinced—did secure one, I felt lonely indeed.

If humility is good for us, I had spent a profitable evening.

Calling on the Bishop is an act of politeness in a newcomer to Malta, and, soon after the evening at Verdala, I determined to get it done.

It is typical of Malta that its chief ecclesiastic should go by the top-heavy title of Archbishop-

bishop, but the reason historically is that the Bishop of Malta is likewise Archbishop of Rhodes, though his pastoral office in respect of the latter appears nowadays to be *nil*. The episcopal palace is in Strada Vescovo, Valletta, and here also are the many *bureaux* of the Curia. In Malta to-day the Church is still as it was when ruled by Innocent III. . . . or by Boniface VIII? I wonder! Only time can show.

I had to wait for some little time in an ante-chamber full of women in faldettas and inferior clergy, all of whom regarded me with interest. I could only hope they did not think I had committed some 'reserved' sin—one, that is, from which only a bishop can absolve; but I could not feel sure. Anyhow, when the bell sounded, a padre pushed me in far out of turn; so, if he was under any impression of the kind, it stood me in good stead.

His Grace the Most Reverend the Archbishop-bishop of Malta and Rhodes!

In an enormous chamber of ecclesiastical design, empty of all except His Grace, the Archbishop-bishop is found, seated—in episcopal 'slacks', if I may be permitted an expression which simply means that he is attired in what is for a bishop nothing very spectacular. Upon the table before him reposes a bell, which the jewelled hand touches from time to time when a suppliant is passing out, something on the lines of a hairdresser's 'Next please!' (And, indeed, is it not a part of a bishop's duty to 'comb the hair' of delinquents?) He does not (naturally) rise as you enter, or when you depart, but extends his hand for you to kiss the episcopal amethyst. This particular bishop had an immobile air which rendered the whole ceremony distinctly impressive.

There was an anything but ordinarily social feeling in the huge gaunt apartment, and, once I had pressed my lips to the mystical ring, I began almost to wish that I had indeed come there with some burden of 'reserved' guilt, since there would then have been something to cut and come again at in the conversational line. Some 'reserved' sins—as, for example, 'assault and battery' upon a cleric—have never seemed to me to involve serious moral turpitude; and I do feel that some conversational gambit of the kind would soon bring the bishops into play.

I never came to know the Archbishop-bishop of Malta any better, though I met him from time to time at this house or the other. I did however come to know more about ecclesiastical affairs in Malta, and the knowledge made me feel both sympathy and respect for the lonely dignity which administers them. I quite ceased to wonder that I had not found that 'geniality' in his Grace of Malta which is so characteristic a feature of our pampered hierarchy at home.

Mr. Chesterton somewhere defines geniality as 'strength to spare'; and on this definition it is indeed hardly to be looked for in a bishop of Malta

CHAPTER XV

A CHAPTER OF 'FROCKS'

IT is almost awful to reflect how many clergy there must be in Malta. The skirt of the padre is as common in the streets of Valletta as khaki was during the war in an English town. Few of them appear to be burdened with a 'cure' of souls, so that one wonders how many of them contrive to live. But wealth is said to consist in the fewness of our wants rather than in abundance of possessions, and on this showing the clergy of Malta are well-to-do enough.

Most English people suppose that 'monk' and 'friar' are identical terms, to be used interchangeably; but in reality the two species are widely different. A monk is, or should be, essentially a cloistered religious—a man who stays in his convent, and comes out seldom, if at all. There are few 'monks' in Malta: such a life would not suit the Maltese temperament at all, for that temperament, whether clerical or lay, is highly social. There are 'friars', however, in cohorts. St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan orders, especially said that a friar's cell should be the whole world; and this is exactly the view of the Maltese regular clergy, which likes to mix freely with the world of Strada Reale, keeping in close touch with the laity, lest it stray from the true path, hearing all its affairs, sowing the good seed as occasion offers, and doing good by stealth.

Hence the exceeding numbers of clergy in the streets, which so astonish the newcomer to Malta, who, with the quaint idea in his head that a *padre* is a person who 'cures' souls, wonders how there can be enough souls in so small an island to go round. Many Maltese clerics are of peasant origin, and can live quite comfortably on macaroni and bread. If *priested*, they say Mass in the morning at one of the innumerable altars, and spend the rest of the day apparently just roaming about—as it were with a 'roving commission' of holiness—conversing here, saying a bit of office there, not neglecting the noon siesta on some public seat, and dropping in at meal-times upon one or other of the faithful.

I do not know whether it is a good thing that there should be so many in Holy Orders, but responsibility for the existing numbers is said to rest with the late Archbishop-bishop, reputed a saint, who, strongly holding by the sentimental doctrine that God will somehow overrule the results of man's improvidence, ordained all who came to him, on the principle that whom God hath called to the vineyard, let not man presume to question. This sounds all right, and edifying enough; but where, as in Malta, the vineyard is very small, too many vintagers rather spoil the wine. Unfortunately, too, only a small proportion of the Maltese clergy can go anywhere but to Maltese colonies abroad; since the majority speak only Maltese, with a smattering perhaps of Italian.

Genuine 'vocations' no doubt occur in Malta as elsewhere in the Christian world; but, to the lay mind at any rate, there is nothing very surprising in the numbers that seek to enter the Maltese vineyard, for there at least every man

can be sure of his penny, whereas, outside the vineyard, many stand idle all day because no man has hired them. The church in catholic countries is a career, but it is also a provision, according to a man's status in society: not even the totally illiterate are shut out from the church as a provision, for a man may be a full regular cleric without being in priest's orders.

A common sight in Malta is the 'crocodiles' of young seminarians and novices out for a walk. The sight used to depress me rather. In so small an island, further segregation must be undesirable. A young man, a boy, is called apart at an early age, clothed in the clerical long frock, and stuffed with scholastic philosophy and dogma, of which far be it from me to decry either. But is there no danger that he will emerge at length with his saving sense of the mystery of life crushed out of him, his mind—his very soul—subdued to the jejune conclusions of what is after all a merely human omniscience? The philosophy of St. Thomas, and the dogmatic view of christian truth, may be well in their way, but both, I think, need much tempering—much correcting, amplifying—by actual contact with the living, breathing, doubting, wondering world of ordinary men. Those little hurrying herds of young men in frocks used, I repeat, to depress me; I felt they were being *smothered*. It seemed to me that the independent, *virile* mind of each was being sucked fearfully from him, to make that mysterious and awful entity, the Visible Church. I did not like this visibility of the church; some processes should be carried on in secret.

It is the boast of the island that anti-clericalism is unknown there. But it is a sorry boast at best,

since the Maltese who quarrelled with the clergy on a vital point would have no alternative but to leave the island. He would become a pariah. Indeed, the clergy in Malta has most things its own way, for the peasantry is illiterate, and the intelligentsia either so rabid on politics, or with its quiver so full of children, as to exclude all other subjects of thought. If a young man be over-active mentally, given to literature and the un-hallowed sweetness of the profane poets, let him be married forthwith: a child a year will soon bring his nose to the common grindstone, and subdue his carnal pride to the single consideration of the main chance. Politics in catholic countries are a safety-valve, and the clergy, wise always in its generation, encourages them.

I was once showing an English Roman Catholic padre round some of the churches of Malta. As usual, they were thronged; the rosary sounded from far and near, penitents passed incessantly in and out of the confessionals. My padre was ravished. "Ah," he exclaimed, "here is real faith! Here is true religion! What would we not give in England, our Lady's Dowry, for such a sight as this?"

Well, personally I would not give one peppercorn!

Yet, from the professional point of view, the sight must have been inspiring enough. Just as inspiring a lawyer might find the throngs outside the Courts of Law in Strada Reale. But to me there seems little to wonder at in this thronging of churches and patterning of rosaries. The people are simple, and they are told that only by the punctual performance of certain good works can they hope to escape the condemnation of

Adam. So they perform those works. So should I, if I believed the same thing. Visiting padres, beholding it all, call it 'faith' And it is faith, if faith mean unquestioning obedience to the word of authority. The Maltese people do genuinely repose trust in the authority which enjoins these observances.

Here, however, follows a glimpse at the reverse side of the picture of faith. I tell this story with some regret, because no part of this narrative aims at being anti-catholic propaganda. A lady of my acquaintance in Malta was once reproving her Maltese maid for some peccadillo "Don't you know," said this earnest Scots lady, "that God is displeased by such things?" "Oh," replied the peccant damsel, happily, "God won't know He's only a baby!"

Incessant reference to our Lord as the Christmas 'Bambino' had given this simple girl the not unnatural impression that the object of her devotions in church was for ever as she saw him in images and pictures of the Virgin and Child. The poor girl knew little of God—much perhaps of babies; and she knew well that the latter do not trouble about the minor imperfections of their elders. Give a baby his bottle, and you may do what you like for all he cares: similarly, turn up regularly at church, and the 'Bambino' will regard with a lenient eye your various shortcomings. Allowing the premises, an Oxford Mods. don would, I think, admit the conclusion. The whole mental process does great credit to the girl's natural wit. And this sort of thing is called the 'simple, happy faith' of a peasant.

An extreme instance, perhaps! Even if it is, what had all the priests been doing during the

twenty or so years of that girl's life ? English catholics sometimes talk loftily about the 'shocking ignorance of christian truth' existing among protestants Does it ever occur to them that quite as shocking examples of ignorance are to be found in a country positively *wooded* with clerical frocks ?

I read much of medieval church history while in Malta, stimulated thereto by the apt analogies all around me ; and the conclusion I came to was that 'the prayers of our fathers, Eleutherius, Augustine', etc., are not likely to bring about the reconversion of England to the faith and obedience of Rome. It is not that we have ceased to be credulous, but simply that these infallible people were stewards for a long time, and we happen to know what their stewardship was like. Now, in England and elsewhere, they are merely critics : a much safer and easier job !

If English Roman Catholics, priests or laymen, want to see their religion working substantially as it worked the world over before the Renaissance and Reformation, let them come to catholic Malta, staunch little Malta, where the Malta Tourist Association will welcome them with open arms. But let them come, not for a few days, but for weeks, months, years ! Let them settle upon the island ! Surely it is worth it ! There has been no *Deformation* in Malta ; the tree grows fair and strong. Come one, come all !

"Here shall ye see
No enemy
But Sirocco and the Gregale !"

Here, indeed, in catholic Malta, shall the English Papalist see what should rarely delight and

refresh his soul. Here is the frocked priest wielding his ancient sway, a contented peasantry almost wholly illiterate, innumerable handsome churches endlessly thronged, processions with lighted candles and images passing amid kneeling crowds through festal streets, religious habits worn in the broad light of day, the Index a working fact (caged books upon public library shelves !), education a clerical monopoly, the rosary incessantly said and sung, shrines at every street-corner, the Press devoted to the church, politics squaring with sacerdotal aspirations, the pope revered and obeyed, the bishop in his curia and upon his throne, protestants tolerated only, Jews practically non-existent, Free-masons unknown !

Let the English catholic come to Malta to live ! It should be his (still more, her) paradise on earth ! Here the medieval God is still in his pictorial heaven, all's right with a priest-directed world !

“ Swiftly walk over the western wave
(English Catholic)
Come soon soon !”

CHAPTER XVI

AN EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE MALTESE

HAMLET without the Prince of Denmark would hardly be a more partial performance than an account of Malta without some mention of St. Paul.

St. Paul, owing to his shipwreck and residence upon the island as recorded in Acts, is the *Divus Divorum*; with whom not even St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, can compete in popular esteem.

On the various 'Festas' which commemorate the principal events in the life of Paul of Tarsus, the whole island of Malta is *en fête* from morning till night. Shops, banks, and government offices are closed, the newspapers do not publish. Instead, the cracked bells of the numberless belfries are ceaselessly agitated by relays of pious volunteers, the streets of Valletta and the villages are decorated on a scale of real magnificence, and a famous image of the saint goes in procession on the shoulders of clients all round the city. The roads leading to Valletta are black from early morning with carozzis, donkey-carts and mule-waggons, packed with men, women, and children of all ages, all coming to see and swell the festivities in honour of the national patron and intercessor.

At nightfall Valletta is illuminated with fairy-lamps; squibs, crackers and rockets, are let off;

quantities of gunpowder are blown sheer away ; and, as the old Scotswoman said of the king, St. Paul "canna say he's no' patronised" in Malta !

St. Paul as a 'divus' is perhaps comical enough, for no saint in the calendar lends himself less naturally to it. We know too much about him. St. Joseph is more the man for it, since of him we know next to nothing. And, indeed, St. Joseph runs St. Paul very close in the matter of bell-ringing and gunpowder. But St. Joseph, after all, was never shipwrecked in Malta !

Paul certainly enjoys in Malta a popularity not accorded him elsewhere in the Roman Catholic world. He is apt elsewhere to be regarded with almost a certain jealousy, as monopolising the Acts to the detriment of Peter. Moreover, he has talked too much, and some of what he says may be held to fit in but queerly to certain theological Procrustes' Beds. He is too explicit, too outspoken, too impressionable ; he should have consulted oftener with Peter, and read less of the literature of his epoch.

But the Maltese care for none of these things. To them Paul is the local 'divus', whom the *Gregale* (for once the breath of God) blew upon their rocky shores, and shipwrecked there, so that he converted Publius, the Roman Governor's son, who in turn converted the island. Therefore the bells ring out, the rockets whizz and bang, the streets are all bunting and festoons, and the idealised image makes its rounds, on every Festa of Paul the Apostle.

Few things in the Acts can match the romance of this story of shipwreck and disaster, and every detail of the gospel narrative tallies with facts

locally well-known. The *Gregale* is indeed a robust and terrible blast, the rocks of Malta perilous in the extreme: we may well imagine the little frail craft driving before the one on to the other, and Paul, eager and interested as ever, catching his first glimpse of Malta through the spume of the sea and the bitter rain. The yellow rocks would be all smudged and smeared, as one has seen them; the land beyond a low-lying desolation dim in the whirling mist. How dreary it must have looked! It is pleasant to know that the 'barbarians' received the survivors with such hospitality.

Throughout the whole story the personality of Paul stands up taller than the mast. "The centurion, willing to save Paul . . ." A sea-voyage is dreary enough at the best of times, and the centurion had probably found the conversation of his prisoner a great solace and delight; so that, when the pinch came, he could not bear that such a capital 'mixer' should be lost to the world. And by a miracle they were saved! It was indeed little less than a miracle, for, had they gone ashore anywhere but just where they did, nothing could have saved them. Then the 'barbarians' were hospitable, and Paul would drive off up to Notabile (in a *carozzi*, no doubt, for the pattern of these vehicles is immemorial) by a road I know very well, to proclaim himself a Roman citizen before the Governor, and be put up at the palace. The Maltese will show you a cave where the saint is said to have lived while in the island, but Paul was too sensible a man to do anything so medieval.

But that Paul did indeed convert Publius, I by no means doubt: he was always converting somebody. So it may well be that the christianity

of the island truly derives from this great and most lovable man.

What would Paul say of it now?

There was, one recalls, a famous occasion when Paul and Barnabas rent their garments and jumped about, making themselves as undignified as possible, in their horror of being taken for *divi*. If Paul could ever be told that all the bell-ringing and rocket-exploding were done in *his* honour, these celebrations I think would cease! Nor do I think that the 'Language' question would interest him much, or that he would long suffer his 'barbarians' to be kept in ignorance because the scribes cannot make up their minds in what tongue, or in how many tongues, to teach them.

Let us try to imagine an Epistle of Paul to his beloved Maltese.

Paul, an apostle, etc., unto the people and rulers of Malta,

Brethren,

It is come to our ears that sad things are said of you,

That ye are given over to contentions, quarrelsome, suspicious one of another, closing your hearts against instruction,

Politically minded, threatening one another, accusing one another, forgetful of my message by Publius:

Whereof we have sore grief.

But now, brethren, we beseech and exhort you to be of one mind,

Knowing that such wranglings are unprofitable unto you;

For it profiteth little in what tongue a man speaketh, but what things he speaketh with his tongue.

Shall a man speak Maltese, let him speak well,

Or Italian, let him not be hasty,

Or English, let him be watchful over himself.

In all things judging the time wisely, whether it be good, respecting his neighbour, grateful for what cometh.

And if ye would know in what tongue your children shall speak,

Let the wise among you take counsel, and let the parents be heard,

For the parent is lord of the child.

And be not swift to take offence, answering mildly,

For I, Paul, lacked not gainsayers.

And above all things, brethren, let your strivings be profitable unto the state,

For ye are called unto service, not unto pride.

Call not one another by ill names, accuse not, threaten not, tempt not,

For this is pride, and ruineth the state.

Let the young men among you be obedient unto instruction,

Knowing that not stature maketh a man,

Hearkening not unto vanity, redeeming the time, contending not with authority, loving meekness, walking in grace.

And let the elders so act that the young may have example,

And the young that the elders may rejoice.

And your presbyters we beseech that they join not in strivings,

For who heareth him of peace, that is given over to war ?

Or cometh unto him in the pulpit, that may be heard crying loudly in the forum ?

But now, most dear brethren, we beseech you to be all of one mind, as we would have you to be,

Knowing that small things of the world may be great according to the spirit.

Wherefore so strive, beloved, that our heart may be comforted in you.

CHAPTER XVII

“ WHEN THE PIE WAS OPENED”

WHEN that great man, Count Smorltork, spent his week in England accumulating material for his work on that country, he was introduced by Mrs. Leo Hunter (authoress of the '*Expiring Frog*') to Mr. Pickwick at the costume garden party at the 'Den'. Mr. Pickwick, hearing of the many subjects on which the Count intended to touch in his forthcoming pages—'music, picture, science, potry, poltics, all tings'—remarked that 'the word politics comprises in itself a study of no inconsiderable magnitude'. The literary ear of Count Smorltork immediately perceived what a truly magnificent chapter opening Mr. Pickwick's remark would make, and down it went in his ever-handy note-book

“ The word poltic suprises by himself”

To my thinking the Count, in his amended version, got nearer the truth than Mr. Pickwick; for, while it is certainly true that politics comprise a study of no inconsiderable magnitude, even truer is it that they 'surprise' in themselves!

And nowhere more so than in Malta. Here they comprise the whole life of the island, and surprise all who visit it.

Politics in Malta are not really a bit more absurd than the same things elsewhere, but, the island being so small, they are more intensive and at

closer quarters. The good old game, according to the rules of the Mother of Parliaments, acquires in the hands of southern players a fine punch, a rare thrill, as may be judged from the fact that, ever since the Malta Legislative Assembly was impressively inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in 1921, no other house of entertainment on the island has been able to compete with its debates. The Chamber is a chamber of verbal horrors: words fly about with the impact of brickbats, and often honourable members are only prevented by their friends from resorting to the arbitrament of blows. I said in a former chapter that the Maltese are an unwarlike people, but you would not think so to see them in debate Then the whirling arms and bristling moustaches are enough to frighten any Turk into a fit!

Surely no wiser thing was ever done by the Imperial Authorities than the grant of self-government to Malta. The island is small, its resource in amusement but slender: what better thing could be devised than a jolly little parliament of their own, where fists may be shaken without fear of the police? The convention of the National Assembly, though satisfying at first, could not go on indefinitely; and its proceedings were sadly hampered by the necessity of presenting some sort of a united front. Resolutions adopted with acclamation were growing wearisome at last; criticism of the existing regime was losing its savour. But then, suddenly, two things happened: the British government granted a local parliament, and Lord Cherub Dreamland returned to Malta!

Who is Lord Cherub Dreamland? He is one of Malta's greatest benefactors. By the sheer force

of his stimulating personality he stirred the long stagnation of the island to its depths, and, by joining ardently in the new politics, he achieved almost alone the 'Brighter Malta'.

But who is this English-sounding person who has so befriended Malta, and how did he get his oar in? His oar was already in; he is a member of the crew. English on the father's side, on the mother's he is a Maltese; and from his mother he inherited a noble title on the island, Marchese della Phœnicia, a fine palace, the Villa Sidonia, and a considerable estate. Coming fresh from Cambridge long ago as Chief Secretary to Government under a former Governor of Malta, he somehow got misunderstood by his mother's people, who 'enraged themselves' against his good intentions; there is some tradition, for which I can by no means vouch, of his having on one occasion ordered the dispersion of a riot with police-batons and of his being seen at the Palace windows with a smile on his face as the bâtons went *thump* on—but I dare not say what sort of a skull the Maltese is, for that is the great political problem of the island! All I know for certain is that Lord Cherub left Malta at length with a legend attached to his name, his enemies upon the island regarding him as marked down for exemplary divine vengeance; but that the chastisement chosen for him on high took the form of holding three important colonial governorships in succession, and his detractors had to console themselves with the 'green bay-tree' of the Psalms.

The reappearance upon the island of this legendary figure during the year preceding the constitution, and his unconcealed intention of joining in the resultant politics, threw Malta into a ferment,

which acted as the very stimulus they required. Parties had been slow to form, there was reluctance in many quarters to come forward; but, with the apparition of Lord Cherub, gauntlets were thrown down all over the place, and one strong party immediately sprang into vital being—the Panzavecchian or anti-Dreamlandite!

The formation of this party is attributed to the amiable character of a certain Monsignor Panzavecchia, a cleric, and now a member of the senate; but it really owes its existence to Lord Cherub Dreamland. Such was the terror he inspired that his opponents simply had to get together, and *stand together*—a much harder task in Malta! They chose Monsignor Panzavecchia, with his fine name, as a rallying-point, and built a platform somewhere between the out-and-out Imperialism of Lord Cherub and the 'Italianism' of the extreme Nationalists. Hence there came at once to be three parties in the Maltese state: the Panzavecchians or 'Political Union', the 'Constitutionals' or Dreamlandites, and the 'Nationalists' or ultra-Italianists. To these parties so formed was added soon a 'Labour' party, which, as almost every working-man in Malta is a capitalist in respect of owning his own tools or plant, was for policy a little hard to place.

The grass springs up quickly in Malta after the torrential autumn rains, but not so quickly as to grow under Lord Cherub's feet. Immediately on arrival in Malta he obtained control of a newspaper organ, and started a campaign which, for stimulation, left nothing at all to be desired. He hit out all round in a series of signed letters to the Press, and contrived to get everybody precisely

on the weak spot. He by no means eschewed personality, so that the Maltese, who are good at this themselves, were for a time almost paralysed with reluctant admiration. No day passed but one of these gad-fly epistles settled on somebody's neck ; the victim writhed and reared, but the writer was already hard at work on the next. Within a bare month from the return to Malta of Lord Cherub, the island was one loud outcry : which moved the instigator about as much as the squeaking of a mouse behind the wainscot. Parties formed to the left and the right, volleying and thundering : Malta was indeed ripe for the coming Constitution !

No more interesting figure than Lord Cherub Dreamland, Marchese della Phœnicia, ever arose in a political arena. He has a very genius of attack. He is the sand-fly of political life, getting through the closest meshing of mosquito-net, making his puncture, and being gone without reprisal. No threats moved him a hair's breadth from his course ; the noisy 'Italian' party, which had so long enjoyed a monopoly of personality and 'tactics', found the tables turned right round on it, and a man fully as clever as the cleverest of them measuring each for a dunce's cap. They writhed and gesticulated with huge display of 'cultural affinity', but their gymnastics did them as little service as their howls : their master simply ticketed each one according to his species, and pinned him up for public derision. A little, dapper man, with a round cherubic face perpetually screwed up in an enigmatic smile, Lord Cherub Dreamland in a few months' campaign took the starch out of the 'Italian' collar, and gibed unkindly at the limp remains.

The elections duly came off in October, 1921; and the result was that the Political Union (Panzavecchians), to its own huge discomfiture, found itself in a small and precarious majority, and faced with the duty of forming Malta's first self-government. Lord Cherub, with a substantial backing, occupied the front opposition bench. Of Lord Cherub it had been widely prophesied that he would not even secure election, but in the event he was triumphantly returned by huge majorities for *two* constituencies, of which he retained the one he preferred (a Valletta seat) and handed over the other to a supporter. His humiliation and subsequent retirement from the island, which had been so confidently predicted and jubilantly cartooned, was indefinitely postponed; there he was on the opposition bench, possessed of all the knowledge of procedure which others lacked, and only waiting for the ill-fated Political Union to set the ball in motion! Meanwhile the 'Italianist' leader, a certain Signor Mufti, had also been returned, for Gozo, with a useful little make-weight backing. It had been remarked that the Prime Minister had kissed his hand to Signor Mufti on the news of the latter's election: which, considering the predicament of the new government, was regarded as significant. The fun promised well!

A word must certainly be said of Signor Mufti: except Lord Cherub, quite the cleverest and most interesting figure in Malta politics. Signor Mufti is a conspicuous example of that 'cultural affinity' which yearns across the straits to Sicily and Italy. During the war he got into trouble with the military authorities, owing to a constitutional inability to leave off talking; he was had up before a court-

martial, and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. But immediately after the war, the then Governor, who was on the point of vacating his office, decided to signalise his departure by an amnesty to Signor Mufti ; , since too much talk is only technically an offence in times of crisis. So Signor Mufti was let out, and he was soon very much about again.

Signor Mufti was not even bound over to keep the peace in the sense of holding his tongue. And indeed, in view of his temperament, a pardon on such terms would have been equivalent to no pardon at all ! Signor Mufti simply could not be quiet for long ; his 'cultural affinities' have so much the upper hand of him. If Signor Mufti had lost any ground during the war, he soon recovered it ; wherever words were flying about, there was Signor Mufti in the midst of them, his high-crowned hat (Italian fashion) towering above the press. And he seemed to have a higher assurance, like Napoleon about bullets, that the word was not yet in any dictionary which should abash him. Lord Cherub, however, found the word !

But Signor Mufti is a redoubtable man, with a real courage of his convictions. A fine debater, a fluent orator, a tireless 'tactician', he was ever the darling of the high spirits at the university ; and, when he was returned at the elections, they and the Lyceum boys organised a sort of Roman triumph for him : of which I was an eye-witness. Signor Mufti, while not fat, is a large man ; but, this notwithstanding, a crowd of boys had got him on to their shoulders, and was carrying him amid plaudits down Strada Reale. The hero of the hour looked a little uncomfortable, even a little nervous ; but it was a great moment for

him, and this recognition of the deep interest he has always taken in university affairs must have touched him a good deal.

But now the elections are over, the whistles and boos have ceased to scare the goats, the first Malta self-government is in being ; and we await only the arrival of H.M.S. *Renown* with H.R.H. on board. There is a lull in the political uproar : 'battle's magnificently stern array' stands at ease for a time, while all parties in the state vie with one another in vindicating the fair name of Melita before the Son of the King. The lion lies down with the lamb, and butter remains unmelted in fire-breathing mouths.

For a week Malta is *en fête* on a scale which rivals St. Paul and outstrips St. Joseph. Distinguished strangers arrive, including a bevy of lady-journalists, from whose advertisement great things are expected. The *Daily Malta Chronicle* publishes a special 'Constitution Day' supplement, containing no fewer than five special articles about the Prince, and innumerable messages of congratulation and goodwill from all parts of the Empire. Everybody is in a fever of loyalty.

The week's festivities begin with a pontifical High Mass at St. John's Co-Cathedral, which His Grace sings, His Excellency and His Honour attend, and to which all the new senators and legislators wend their way in stately procession through a Strada Reale packed with cheering crowds. The effect of this dedication has scarcely subsided, when, amid tumults of excitement, the *Renown* is descried at early morning far off upon the sea ! Nearer and nearer she comes, a mass of flags ; escorted by destroyers and hovered over by planes. She enters the Grand Harbour to

a deafening crash of guns from all the forts ; a boat puts off from the Marina, crowded with cocked hats and thick with gilded swords. H.R.H. is graciously pleased to step ashore — followed proudly by H.E. who has been on board to offer homage. A hundred officials wait on the quay, each is presented ; then, amid banging of guns and frenzied playing of bands, the Royal Person is borne off by car *via* Florian for the Palace Square.

Inside the Palace, in the throne-room, a notable gathering has now assembled, consisting of all the naval and military chiefs, the civil and commercial powers, the foreign consuls, and representatives chosen from all aspects of Maltese life. In they all come, looking like their own signed portraits, horribly encumbered with swords and emblems of state ; and are shown to their crimson seats by Gentlemen Ushers. Outside in the splendid corridor are the wives and families, all in their festal best.

Arrived in the Square without, the Prince reviews the troops. This does not take long, and a few moments later the royal party enters the Palace. A breeze passes over the bidden guests waiting in the Hall of St. Michael and St. George. The folding-doors are thrown open : all rise : there is a clanking of swords, a jingle of spurs !

H.R.H. the Prince of Wales !

He has ascended the dais, and is reading a speech. Reference, with exact dates, is made to the greatness of Malta in times gone by ; the Prince can see no reason why this generation should not emulate the deeds of its forefathers. He alludes to the senators and legislators before him, and is sure that these are just the men to uphold

the glory of their native-land. In the name of the King, his Royal Father, he declares the first parliament of Malta duly constituted and empowered.

There is nothing more to be done. But oh yes, there is! H.E., in ringing tones, begs His Royal Highness to honour us all by conferring the order of Knight Bachelor upon a distinguished patriot. H.R.H. graciously pleased! Patriot led forward, amid respectful cheers,—is dubbed, and withdraws. Meeting melts away, buzzing. H.R.H. photographed with distinguished entourage in courtyard of Palace.

Follows—a luncheon, to meet H.R.H. Follows—a garden-party at San Antonio, to meet H.R.H. Follows—a dance at the Palace, to meet H.R.H. The Grand Harbour is a blaze of coloured lights, and criss-crossed with innumerable search-lights. There is shouting and cheering and playing of bands; streets sumptuously decorated, ships of war splendidly 'dressed'. Next evening there is a gala performance at the Opera, with H.R.H. in the Royal box, and H.E., and a select party of the illustrious. Cheers greet him, and the longest of all the operas is warbled to its end! Afterwards, H.R.H. goes off with the Admiral Commander-in-chief to Admiralty House for (dare we say it?) a drink!

The Prince has come, smiled his famous smile upon us and gone. The *Renown* is but a speck upon the eastern horizon. The cheering subsides, the bands go home, the bunting comes down, the ships of war 'undress': a Sirocco blows and everybody has a headache. Malta, however, is now self-governing, with a senate and an assembly of her own; the National Convention

has borne fruit, the patriots are appeased, there is nothing to do but get to work !

Frankenstein face to face with his monster !
Or is it Pygmalion ?

CHAPTER XVIII

LA HAUTE POLITIQUE

AT just about this time the following words appeared in a Maltese paper, forming the conclusion of an article by myself :—

“ Malta is a young self-government, and her first page must be largely pothooks and strokes. Let them but be seemly pothooks, regular firm strokes ; and there is no reason in nature or out of it why the Book of Malta should not in time become like one of those old Missals one sees, the work of patience and the fear of God, full of beautiful glowing pictures, and initial letters illuminated in gold and blue.”

Chorus : Wow-wow-wow !

I do not know what Signor Mufti thought of those words, if he ever read them, or what Lord Cherub Dreamland. I have indicated, however, in the chorus, what they now sound like to the author himself. But there seems always so much hope at the beginning of a new thing : there is such enthusiasm, one feels good must come out of it. I looked upon Malta’s new rulers, when I saw them follow one another into church that day, with real sympathy ; I could, emotionally, have wept over them in their black coats and creased trousers ; I agonised over them, willing them to do well. I felt almost as one feels at the christening of an infant, while it lies in its nurse’s arms, utterly, utterly innocent : for while a man has as yet done

nothing, he has done well, poor soul ; and a page is a fair page, while it remains unmarked.

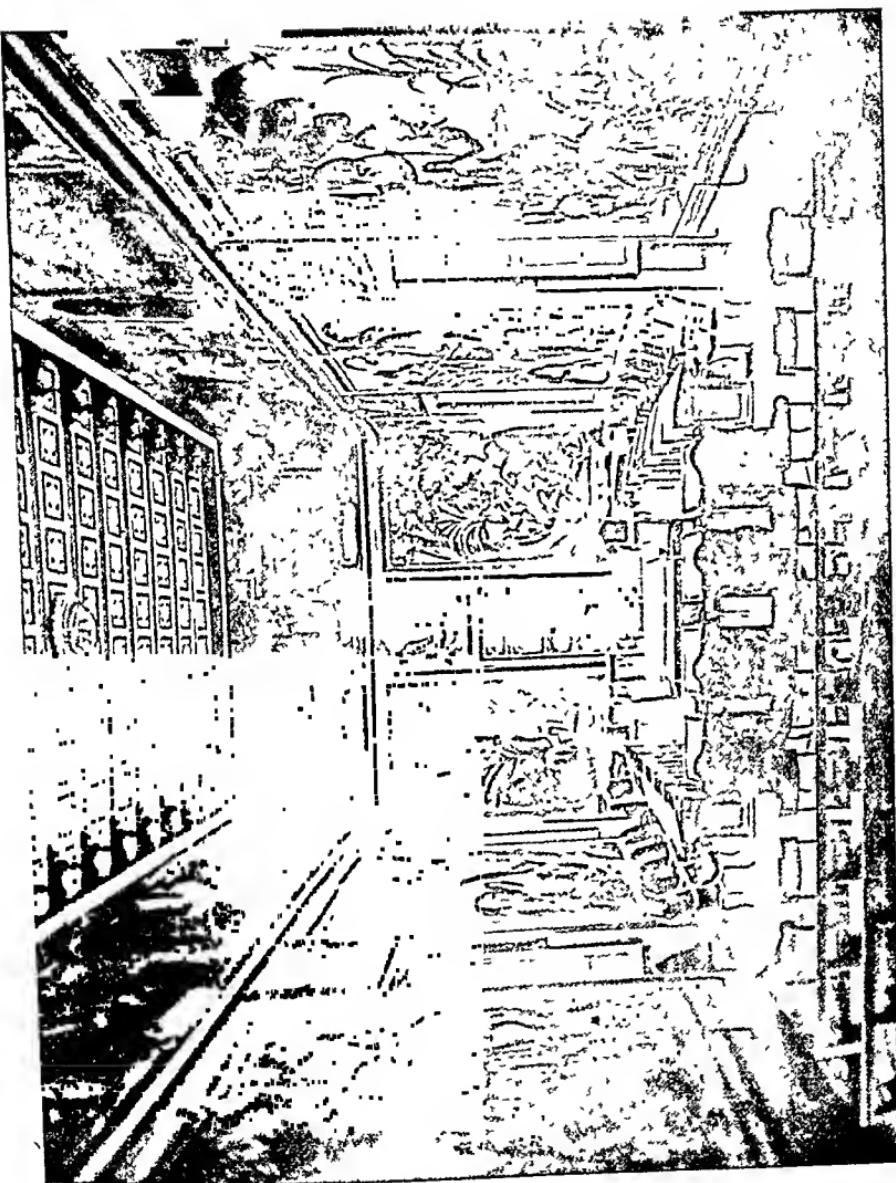
Within a week, however, the new Malta Parliament was hard at it, to the manner born, in the way of the wide world over ; and there was more pothooking of one another than stroking.

The first result of the new régime was disquieting enough for one in my anomalous position. The various English heads of department—the 'Old Gang', as Lord Cherub affectionately styled them—one by one 'softly and silently vanished away', leaving their place to be filled from local talent. The first to go was the Chief Commissioner of Police, a martinet, but just, who had worked up the force in Malta to a pitch of real efficiency : him followed soon afterwards the Comptroller of Posts ; and later went the Auditor, an officer seconded from the Colonial Audit department. A professor of English Literature began to feel lonely indeed.

But, somewhat to the annoyance of Maltese legislators, the Lieutenant-Governor, instead of leaving the island, stayed on with reduced work and augmented salary. Not only did this officer remain, but a cognate post, that of Legal Adviser to the Governor, was created and filled from home. Here was gall !

To no man upon the island, certainly, can the Constitution of Malta have come with more relief than to this same harried Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Secretary to Government. He, poor man, had formerly been responsible for the whole executive of government, but without any of the 'divinity' which 'hedges' a genuine H.E. He was like the cox of a university eight : cursed for everything that went wrong, and overlooked when things went right. It had been his duty to

[Facing page 146]
THE CHAMBER OF (VERBAL) HORRORS!
The Tapestry Chamber in the Palace of Valletta, where the Malta Legislative Assembly meets



attend every day at the elective assembly, when in session, there to be incessantly quarrelled with by the evergreen Signor Mufti ; who, no matter how perfunctory the proceedings of that body prior to the Constitution, was always a member of it and always in his place, primed with a hundred questions and objections, and quite evidently regarding the Chief Secretary in the light of an animated cock-shy. Verily, there are some rotten jobs in our 'far-flung' empire, and the sun never set on arottener than this of H.H. Now, however, he was free for ever of Signor Mufti ; and he had generally so much less to do that in future he could give more time to his own affairs in the delightful official residence which was still to be his.

In my opinion Lord Cherub Dreamland committed a serious error of tactics during the first session of the Malta legislature. If he wanted the government to hang itself, he should have paid out the rope ; but he did not, he kept on shortening and jerking it before the head was in the noose, thus warning the intended victim to be on the alert. He proposed votes of censure before the government had had time to do anything at all, censurable or otherwise ; and he generally so harried that uniquely incompetent body of neophytes as to stir up sympathy for them in all quarters. He overdid things.

What he should have done (in my opinion) was, sit quietly by for a time, with that enigmatic smile of his burning like X-rays on the government's troubled interior ; he should have criticised indulgently, as one does the first efforts of a child in any direction, thus lulling suspicion, and leading the tyros opposite to launch out not wisely but too far. They would probably soon have done so,

got wrong sides up with the electorate, and worked out Lord Cherub's salvation for him. As things were, the government was afraid to make any move at all, but concentrated all its energies on pointing out how the opposition obstructed them, thus scoring a distinct point. When there is a wolf at the door, the wise lamb stays indoors. The wolf in the tale, however, chalked his husky voice and floured his sooty paws, so that the lambs, thinking him an old sheep, came out to play and were gobbled up at once. This is what Lord Cherub should have done; but he was too eager, too anxious to have done with the business; he forgot to chalk his voice and flour his paws.

What actually happened is, that the government, after doing nothing for a long time, and resigning once, formed a coalition with the Labour Group, which put it in a working majority. Labour's single stipulation was that a compulsory education bill should be introduced at the earliest possible moment; to which the government, knowing that the 'earliest possible moment' is somewhere about 1990, readily agreed. But after some time, Labour, under pressure from behind, got restive, and the coalition fizzled out. Did the government resign? Did it appeal to the country? Nothing of the kind! It appealed to Signor Mufti and his Merry Men, with whom, as everybody knew, it had 'cultural affinities' of the most pronounced. Signor Mufti took no portfolio, but he took charge; and what he demanded was immediate legislation to give effect to Pari-Passu, which solution of the 'Language' question must here be briefly explained.

In discussing Pari-Passu, we approach the very core and kernel of Malta politics; for Pari-Passu

is in fact one solution of the 'Language' question, which, with its cultural corollaries, is the one serious point at issue between the parties. But for this 'question' there would be no 'politics' in the strict sense in Malta at all ; and, if the dispute were ever to be settled one way or another (than which nothing is less likely), the Malta Parliament might hope to become like the 'States' of the well-governed Channel Islands, and meet only when there was something to talk about.

Pari-Passu simply means the enforcing of an equal amount of Italian wherever English is taught. The one is never to be allowed without an exactly equal amount of the other. The two languages are to 'advance' in Malta with equal step ; and, needless to say, the brace of teachers required for the purpose will split one moderate salary between them ! But this aspect of the thing is not considered : Pari-Passu, though likely in my opinion to be unjust to the teachers and detrimental to the children, is held to be, and may indeed be, the only practical solution of a question which has split Malta into two throughout the British occupation.

What are the facts ? The facts are as follows. Nobody in the world knows the Maltese language except the Maltese themselves, and hence a secondary language is essential. What is it to be ? It might be English only, but the Italianists would never consent to that. It might be Italian only, but that is out of the question. Or the 'secondary language' might be determined for each child by the 'Free Choice' of the parents ; and this is in fact the policy advocated by Lord Cherub and his 'Constitutionals'. But, as English is bread-and-butter to the Maltese lower classes, while

Italian is a sentiment of the professional and land-owning elements, the Italianists believe, with much grounds, that upon this settlement Italian would very soon fade out altogether. Hence the practical alternatives are, 'Free Choice' or 'Pari-Passu'.

How do the parties stand?

Labour is supposed to be for 'Free Choice'.... *But* the Labour leader is (or was, in my day) a lawyer! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a Maltese lawyer to let down the Italian language; and hence, between the policy of Labour at elections and the feelings of Labour when elected, there is grievous intestine war. Labour is uncertain. Remember that 'Labour' in Malta is merely a name for a party of philanthropic sentiments; it in no way stands for the Maltese lower classes.

Signor Mufti and his Merry Men would be glad never again to hear a word of English spoken from one end of the island to the other. They strongly hold themselves to be racially Italians. But they are astute and practical politicians, and they know that the utmost they can hope for is to keep Italian alive by a policy of forcing it upon the whole literate population, whether the population really wants it or not. Hence Pari-Passu!

The policy of Lord Cherub and his 'Constitutional' party is 'Free Choice'. We are left then with the policy of the government, or 'Panzavecchians', or Political Union.

The Political Union, at the time of the first elections, had no *defined* policy; and, as this is precisely the condition of the majority of the electors, it naturally got into power. The people did not know what it wanted, but it *did* know

what it did *not* want; and, inasmuch as the Political Union officially stood for not wanting what was not wanted, they voted for it. The Maltese people, like most peoples, really prefer a middle policy—something neither all one thing nor all another; a compromise. Malta *must* have English, but a large section of it genuinely wants Italian also: the Political Union realised this, and called itself the 'political *union*.' To this party, after a short experience of government, Pari-Passu seemed the practical embodiment of the middle course; and therefore they were not unwilling to purchase the support of Signor Mufti at the price of declaring in its favour.

At the first blush, indeed, Pari-Passu would seem to be the practical solution; but, when it comes down to brass tacks, a hundred new problems arise. No man can serve two masters. The practical result of Pari-Passu, in the majority of cases, is that its subjects speak two languages *badly*, and cannot write either even passably. This hardly signifies among the lower classes; but in the lyceum and in the university, where written examinations are unavoidable, it creates a farcical state of things. One student has loved Italian, and hated English; he passes brilliantly in the former, fails dismally in the latter: *actum est!* . . . There is weeping and gnashing of teeth. What does that student do? Does he become a convinced opponent of Pari-Passu? He does not: he becomes a convinced opponent of the English examiners. He betakes himself and his grievance ('ruined career . . . our poor student') to some Italianist politician of light and leading, crying 'Father, I have *not* sinned, and I *am* worthy

to be called thy son !' And what does the politician do ? Does he say ' Well, my poor boy, it's all along of this b—— Pari-Passu ' (in Italian, of course!). He does not : he produces his stiletto from under his suspender and kills the fatted professor !

Then, again, there is the expense of Pari-Passu. Not many teachers know both English and Italian well enough to teach a high standard of both : hence every teacher must be duplicated. Even if but one salary be split among the two, does this make for efficiency ? Malta simply cannot afford Pari-Passu, and that is all about it.

There is, of course, and can be, no such thing as Pari-Passu. No two things can be made to advance ' with equal step ' in the same person. English and Italian are two very different tongues, the outcome of two very different temperaments ; and the Maltese mind which excels at the one will in all probability, and for that very reason, *not* excel in the other. Unless the standard demanded in the two languages is reduced to a level which would make a laughing-stock of the word ' university ', under Pari-Passu there must continue to be hard cases, ' ruined ' careers, and bad blood. There can, I repeat with emphasis, be *no such thing* as true Pari-Passu, except in the minds of politicians and on the pages of statute-books.

The truth about Malta, as revealed in her politics, appears to be that the island should never have come under British rule. We have now been in Malta for over a hundred years, and the ' Language Question ' is as far as ever from being satisfactorily settled. What would other countries have done ? What the Germans ? What the French ? What, and more especially (judging by their present action in the Tyrol), the Italians ?

We may judge of what these peoples would have done by what Napoleon actually did do in Malta. He called there on his way to Egypt, bundled out the Knights of St. John with their Grand Master, and sized up the local situation in a glance. He saw that the Maltese do not really know what their race is, or where their 'cultural affinities' really lie; and in any case he did not care. Malta existed to be useful to France, and to do this she must become French. Driving up Strada Mercanti, in a coach which is still to be seen in the Palace armoury, to his lodging near what is now the General Post Office, Napoleon thought it all out; and that very next morning a notice appeared and was posted up—which deserved to be called a 'brief' far more than most papal effusions—announcing that, from twelve noon on the following day, *the language of Malta was French*.

Napoleon himself was a native of Corsica, as rampant an island as any in existence, and he knew how to deal with southern peoples. He knew all about *suaviter in modo*, and he likewise understood *fortiter in re*! Napoleon, that brutal army surgeon, would have administered a 'Number 9 Pill' to the 'language question' in Malta, and he would have purged out such 'cultural affinities' as he disapproved with castor-oil!

But Napoleon sailed away to Egypt; and the Maltese rose against the tiny French garrison, and, with British aid, expelled it. And then began the reign of England on the island—and the régime of a ladies' physician, which has petted and fussed a perfectly sound subject into a *malade imaginaire*! 'The Powders: one to be taken on retiring to rest.' 'The Tablets: one to be dissolved occasionally on the tongue.' 'The Mixture: one tea-

spoonful after meals.' 'The Tonic: a wineglassful when the symptoms are troublesome.' 'The Sedative: to be taken with three parts of water last thing at night.' The Beef Extract, the Chicken Jelly, the Very Old Light Port!

My own opinion is that, barring a little brusqueness of manner here and there—not a bit worse than English people have to put up with at home from the same sort of official—England's hundred year rule has made a hydropathic of Malta and run it mainly at English cost. We have never, so far as I can see, sent out a single man who could say 'Bo' to a goose! And it is further my opinion that self-government in Malta is only what they have always had there—ever since they were 'not conquered' by England,—the only difference being that now they must shoulder their own responsibilities and provide their own scapegoats.

CHAPTER XIX

WHO IS MELITA, WHAT IS SHE?

THE Maltese are indeed 'no ordinary' people, as can be proved by the fact that an abstruse ethnological point has become with them a major political issue. Who and what are the Maltese by race? What blood flows in their veins? Whence come the one or two root-words of their own Maltese language? The French at one time got the length of duelling over differences of literary taste, and the Maltese are not far off it in their disputes over the above points.

A boiling surf of speculation spouts over the submerged rock of Maltese origins, and there is much froth. The Maltese are at present of two races: those who hold with Signor Mufti are Italians, and came across the straits from Sicily; those who hold with Lord Cherub are Phoenicians, and first came to Malta with bales from Tyre and Sidon. The puzzling thing is that both the Italian-Maltese and the Phoenician-Maltese are agreed in believing the Stone Age temples excavated by Professor Zammit to be the work of aboriginal Maltese who were on the island all the time!

Maltese patriots refer frequently to 'our pre-past unique in Europe'. These words occurred in an eloquent proclamation announcing the public holiday henceforth for ever to be observed on the anniversary of the raising of the Great Siege.

One has heard of 'a woman with a past', but here is a people with a 'pre-past!' How do they know it was theirs? It might so easily have got mixed up with somebody else's. There is no being tidy and exclusive in the pre-past!

The Maltese, then, on their own showing, have a wonderful story. They are Italians, they are Phœnicians, and they belong in their integrity to the 'pre-past'. Signor Mufti came from Sicily, Lord Cherub from Tyre; and both alike were welcomed by Professor Zammit at the door of a Stone Age temple. If you want to insult Lord Cherub, tell him he isn't a Phœnician. And if you are curious to see the Sicilian aspect of Signor Mufti, whisper in his ear that a more obvious Phœnician than himself was never seen in the palmy days of dear old Sidon.

Naturally 'our poor students' take part in these ethnic excursions. Most of them came from Italy with Signor Mufti, and must have been a great blessing to him on the journey; but a few shared Lord Cherub's dghaisa from Tyre—what room was left when the Ladies' Constitutional Club had been duly accommodated on the principle of 'ladies first'! A few students belong to the 'pre-past'.

As for the Pari-Passuists, the cradle of this extraordinary race is wrapped in profound obscurity. Some think that a collision took place somewhere off Malta between the converging triremes and dghaisas, and that, in the general *sauve qui peut*, some of the Phœnicians got picked up by Italians, and vice versa. But as the whole episode is an affair of germs, and as germs easily get mixed, it is impossible to speak with any confidence.

All one can say is, that, when the trireme arrived from Italy, and the dghaisa from Tyre, both found Professor Zammit's stay-at-homes quietly in possession. These poor stay-at-homes, they comprise nine-tenths of the Maltese people at the present time, but they are never allowed to get a word in edgeways. Vocal Malta is all Italian or Phoenician. Signor Mufti lectures to the Malta Boys' Club about that interesting journey he made long ago with the Roman and Etruscan and Samnite germs; what time Lord Cherub is drawing tears from ladies' eyes as he recounts, Othello-like, the perils and privations of that awful passage from Tyre.

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CHAPTER XX

PLEASE PASS THE SALT!

THE Maltese, like the Scots, are a prickly people, 'fair affrontit' very readily. As the Scots have a thistle for their national emblem, so the Maltese might well have a prickly-pear. Their idea of themselves is very considerable, their belief in their island immense.

Since themselves and their island are all that many of the Maltese know, it would indeed be an extreme pessimism, equivalent to final despair and the wholesale condemning of creation, were they to take any other view of themselves. But 'observation with extended view' does not as a rule alter it in the least; they commonly return to their island with but the more zest for its life and institutions. They are an intensely home-loving people: which trait of character, while amiable in itself, is bad for their sense of proportion. They have not learnt, cannot apparently learn, to add just a pinch of ordinary table-salt even to the King's Dish of themselves.

If few Maltese are widely travelled, as few are widely read. They have no literature of their own, and the love of reading, like charity, should begin at home. There are Maltese exhaustively read in Maltese and Mediterranean history, in branches of science, medicine, law, and like subjects; but such specialised reading does little for the imagination and sense of humour:

the Maltese are a practical, not an imaginative, people, and the sense of proportion which their physical geography makes so hard for them is not much aided by general reading.

Always, where the Maltese appear at their worst, it is to be remembered in extenuation that the mentality of most is bounded by the sharp cliff-edges, and limited to the exiguous natural resources, of a rocky seventeen miles by twelve.

Two recent examples may serve to illustrate the boomerang (or Boojum-erang !) properties of a joke in Malta.

Not long ago an Army chaplain, an Irishman, wrote down in the suggestion-book at the Garrison Library that the word 'Silence' which figured conspicuously in some rooms should be put up also in Maltese, since many members of the library seemed unable to profit by the admonition as it stood. This was fair enough criticism, in view of the facts, even if it be admitted that the padre's suggestion was probably not intended to conciliate. But what an uproar followed ! It was immediately written underneath that the padre had deliberately insulted the whole Maltese nation ; and, since this was but the climax of a series of similar outrages, the peccant padre, after an interview with the Governor, saw the 'Boojum'.

This is a good instance of what happens to alien jokers in Malta. The Maltese cannot *bear* to have their legs pulled, however mildly—even when they dangle them like bell-pulls.

The second example occurred during my own experience of the island, and is even more terrible.

A youthful R.A.F. officer apparently underwent an experience similar to ours in our first house, and he wrote a humorous account of it home to

his father. Now, his father was an editor. He printed a part of the son's letter in his paper, thinking it a good joke; and—a copy found its way to Malta!

The letter was a caricature of the actual occurrence, no doubt; and one may admit, perhaps, that it might have deterred a possible tourist from coming to Malta: but—was it necessary for the whole island to take it as a criminal libel? 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much!' . . . It must be an uneasy conscience which flares up over such ridiculous trifles.

"And there was mounting in hot haste: the
steed,

The mustering squadron, and the clattering
car,

Went pouring forth with an impetuous speed,
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war...."

This is what happened in Malta over that letter. Even the *Daily Malta Chronicle*, departing for once from its usual reasonable attitude, had a front-page reference to the 'incident', calling upon the military authorities to constrain this officer to behave like 'an officer and a gentleman'. Where, O where, was the salt which should be on every table? Do officers never write home to their fathers? May not a gentleman make a joke?

Though the father wrote out to Malta, protesting that the blame (if blame there were in the matter) rested entirely with himself, still the offence was too dire, Malta's wound too deep. Somebody must be sacrificed; and, since there was no getting the father to come out to Malta for a lesson in the respect due to the island, the son must stand proxy for him. The same heavy

hand which once excised a stanza from Mifsud Bonnici's poem now beckoned awfully to the broadcaster of unsavoury stories, and . . . *exit iste!*

But what a sorry spectacle!

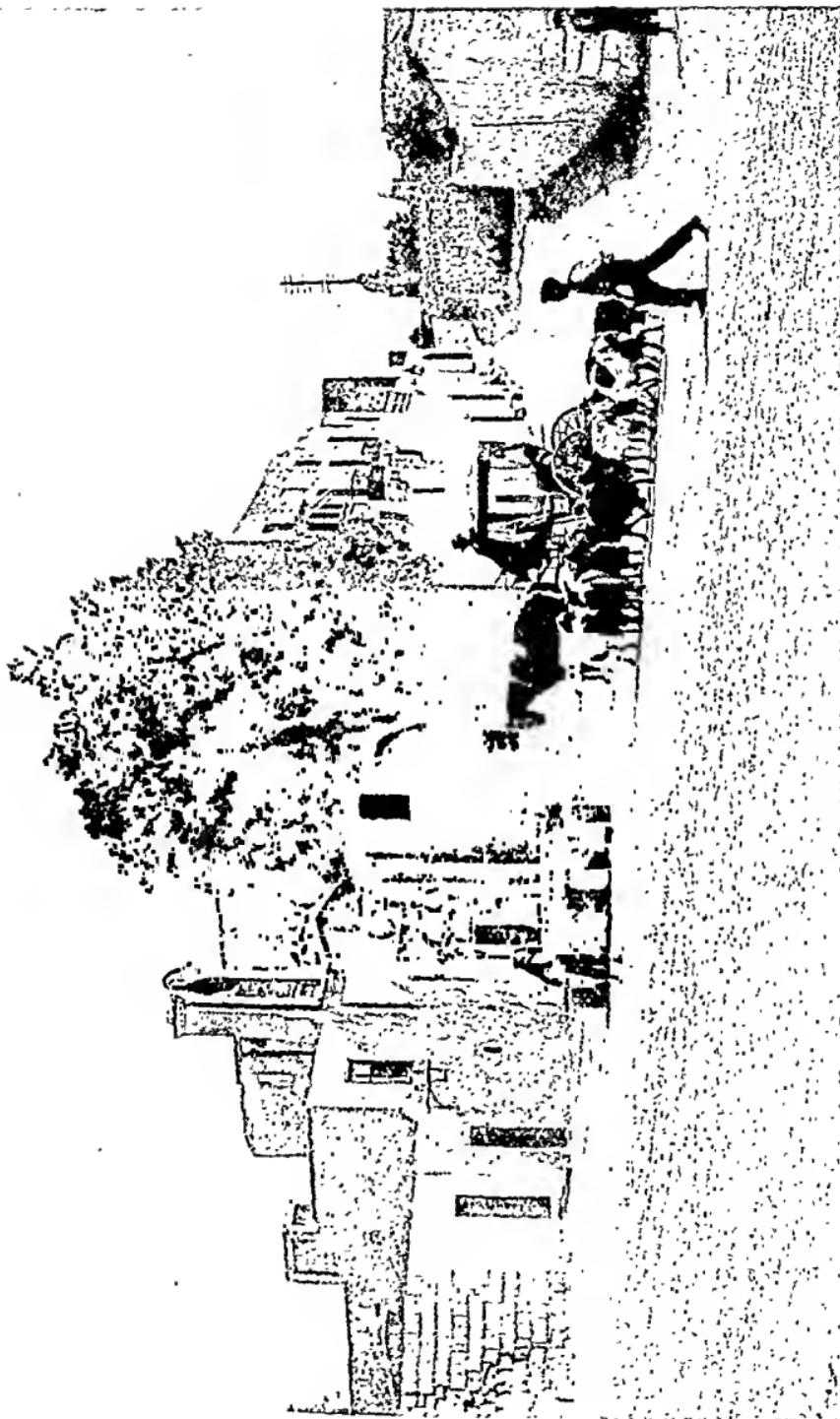
Why should Malta be thus tenderly apron-stringed? Why should the Maltese be protected from the things the naughty boys say? They are a grown-up people, self-governing, and I know not what; yet, whenever their poor little feelings are hurt, somebody must be smacked for it. I fully agree that *somebody* ought to be smacked! But this sort of thing won't do—it quite definitely will not do: either Malta is able to look after itself, or it is not. As for the British authorities, their attitude strikes me as just too silly for words.

Yet the Maltese themselves write whatever they like to the Press about one another and about any English person who happens to offend them; there are some great scribes among them. I remember a capital letter all about me; written by a 'Stricken Deer'—variously rendered by the compositor as a 'sticken' and a 'sicken' deer. But whatever sort of a deer it was, it went for me like a goat. I got a most fearful butting—all because I had ploughed some of 'our poor students' in a naughty unfair examination. But I didn't write home to mother about it: I didn't even ask the Imperial Authorities to have that naughty deer chained up where it couldn't do me any harm. I had my poor little feelings, just as Malta has; but I knew only too well that no big grown-up military authorities were going to do any smacking for me.

Not so long ago a letter appeared in the Australian Press, saying disparaging things about the

Maltese as immigrants. It was very unfair, for it has been proved that the sober, industrious Maltese peasant makes a very good class of immigrant—when Pari-Passu does not prevent his passing the landing-test. But what happened about this in Malta? Were the military authorities asked to whip those naughty Australians? No. The officer in charge of Maltese emigration wrote a polite, moderate, reasonable letter to the editor of that Australian paper, pointing out the proved facts; and he received in reply a handsome apology for the misrepresentation.

That is surely the way to set about things, if you are a self-governing country Just keep your temper, rally your sense of humour or proportion, and insist quietly on the facts.



ITEMS OF MALTA

(Goats, a carozzi, a fountain, a belfry, and—less typical—a tree)

CHAPTER XXI

PAPERS AND PARCHMENTS

THE Press is nowadays so important that a word should certainly be said of its manifestations in Malta. In Malta there are many papers, some in English, some in Italian, some in the vernacular, and some in Pari-Passu—by which last I mean a mixture of English and Italian. It may be doubted, however, whether any paper has much real influence, because in so small a community everybody knows who the editor is and all about him from the days when he wore little petticoats like his sisters. A paper would be much harder to run without the intimidating anonymity which in this country usually surrounds its editor; people have so much less respect for the opinions of a man to whom they can give a name.

There is, in point of strict fact, only one real newspaper in Malta: the *Daily Malta Chronicle and Garrison Gazette*, owned and ably edited by the Brothers Bartolo. This publication gets all the telegrams, publishes a weekly letter from London and Paris, and is the principal advertising medium of the island. Its politics are strongly imperial, and locally it supports the Constitutional Party, of which its editor, Dr. Augusto Bartolo, is one of the shining lights.

Although almost every Englishman on the island gets and sees the *Daily Malta Chronicle*

for its garrison news, it is a stupid habit among the English to pretend that they never read it, except for the amusement to be had from its occasional lapses from the English which (it is to be hoped) the king invariably uses. Nothing could be sillier. The British in Malta certainly have not that command of their own language which might entitle them to snigger ; and, in any case, the English of the *Chronicle* is quite as good as that of most local papers in England itself. I have seen worse ' howlers ' in *County Advertisers* at home than ever I saw in the *Malta Chronicle* ; and when one reflects that the compositors for the most part know not a word of English, the correctness of the print throughout is a matter for admiration. The *Chronicle* is in fact a very good little paper, handy in size, attractively produced, and giving the garrison in Malta a much better pennyworth than their manners towards it deserve. It is a weak-minded affectation to sneer at everything local in Malta, and the occasional errors in the *Chronicle* would pass quite unnoticed by the Service purists if they appeared in a British paper.

Besides the *Chronicle*, which is a morning paper, there is also an evening paper published in English. This is the *Malta Herald*, which consists as a rule of little more than a series of letters to the editor on subjects of local interest. It prints anything of that sort which is sent it, without committing itself to agreement with the correspondents ; and, because many of the letters are exceedingly piquant, it enjoys a considerable circulation. The main feature of the *Herald* in my day used to be the daily letter from Lord Cherub Dreamland, wherein he developed his

views up to date. Unfortunately, the *Herald* had an extremely erratic compositor, and an independable proof-reader, who often between them did less than justice to Lord Cherub's flowing periods: whether they were opposed to Lord Cherub on political issues, or what, I do not know, but they were certainly the only men on the island who had the upper hand of that redoubtable champion. By merely transposing a few letters, than which nothing is easier for a compositor, they frequently presented Lord Cherub in an anything but dignified light. Lord Cherub no doubt consoled himself with the reflection that so small and base a thing as a flea had power to render even Napoleon uneasy in his clothes.

It was in the *Herald* that all the letters appeared which from time to time went for me. The 'sicken' or 'sticken' deer bled profusely into this paper, and the public outcry which condoled with the poor beast's sufferings found here a vent. But the 'sicken' deer, resentful as it was, was a mere nothing to the letters which appeared (under frightful pseudonyms) a few months later, when it was asserted that Nero never treated the Christians as I was treating 'our poor students', and demanded that the Governor immediately intervene to rid the island of an unparalleled despot.

The *Herald*, indeed, was always well worth reading. Some of its contributors wielded a terrific pen, mightier than the average sword, and fearfully smote the enemies of the common weal. In spite of the almost fiendish ingenuity of the compositor, the most terrifying cartels and defiance were ultimately *decoded*; and bloodshed must certainly have followed, but that

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the challengers, deprecating too much fame, usually adopted a *nom de guerre*.

Another English publication on the island is a weekly, called the *Malta John Bull*. This production is, I understand, the possession and work of some English persons long resident in Malta. I know it by reputation only, just as I know its London namesake ; it caters, I believe, more especially for the rank and file of the Army and the Lower Decks of the Navy, but I am quite unable to say whether its appeal is widely supported by this difficult and capricious public.

All the rest of the Malta Press is either in Italian or the vernacular. The Italian papers appear in very black type, and scare the heart out of all who can read Italian. What public there is for the vernacular, I do not know ; but Maltese was never meant, I am sure, to be rendered in Roman characters. So rendered, it looks something like this, yards and yards of it *Ijjjghaij xhjgh qzjghp gha hal tjgharxien*—and so on. But neither the Italian nor the vernacular papers are *newspapers*, except in so far as they retail local affairs ; they are more of the nature of political reviews.

During the heat of the elections many extra sheets naturally made their appearance, and in these the cartooning talent of the island made cautionary play with the personal peculiarities of the protagonists. The work, which was undeniably clever, was in the true southern vein of brutality ; no reticences at all were observed, and the candidates paid the full price of being in the public eye. Since seeing some of these cartoons, I have quite ceased to wonder at the reluctance of many Maltese to come forward

politically. All over the continent of Europe I have noticed that the cartoonist goes out of his way to be ugly and offensive ; it may be a small point, but it is significant, that a man's legs (which have nothing to do with the point of the cartoon) are always shown as bristling with hair. If anybody had wanted evidence of the brutality of the German mind before the war, they had only to look at that country's comic papers ; and similarly in Malta, much of the work spoilt itself on the comic side by being wantonly revolting. Only in England, it may be remarked, is the politician spared this sort of indignity.

There was a thing published and extensively bought in Malta during my first year (whether still in the body, or out of it, I know not) called the *Malta Punch*. It was a Pari-Passu production, and it was seriously misnamed ; it should have been called the 'Malta Pink 'Un', inasmuch as it largely appealed along those familiar lines. Perhaps it was more Rabelaisian than the 'Pink 'Un', and less delicately suggestive, but, alas, my notoriety at the university brought the Rector and the admirable and delightful Secretary of that time into a good deal of mention there. It is remarkable that the wags never directly alluded to me, but the Rector was pilloried every week, and the Secretary likewise. As an example of this sort of thing the authorities at the university had to contend against, I may give the reason : which was that a new rule had just been made (or rather an old one enforced) whereby a student absenting himself was obliged to explain his absence—a reasonable enough ordinance, one would think, but it was stigmatised in the *Punch* as an outstanding instance of the new spirit of

Czarism at the university, against which 'our poor students' must rally all their resources, lest worse befall them. Hence they showed their love and respect for 'our Alma Mater' by poking vulgar fun at her. The sons of Noah were more excusable, for their parent was at least drunk, whereas the 'Alma Mater' of the *studenti* was sober and trying to do her duty by them.

So much for the Malta Press: we may turn now to the Law Courts, Valletta's centre of gravity and the favourite institution of the island. The Law is the profession of professions in Malta, and almost every public man of importance is a lawyer.

Amusingly enough, the Maltese-English pronunciation of the word 'lawyer' is—liar. That is exactly how it sounds, though let me hasten to add that the sound is anything but suited to the sense among the respectable legal fraternity of Malta. But picture my emotions when a charming Maltese girl whom I met at afternoon-tea soon after our arrival on the island told me that she came of a family of *liars*! Her father, she said, was a 'liar,' her grandfather had been a most distinguished 'liar,' and most of her brothers were studying hard and with much display of inherited talent to become 'liars.'

The Law Courts are situated in the middle of Strada Reale, Valletta, and a stranger's attention would at once be drawn to them by the large crowd which is always assembled outside. Nothing so strongly appeals to the instincts of the Maltese as a wordy forensic wrangle. The island enjoys its own code of laws, some of which—more especially those relating to inheritance—are exceedingly complicated. Moreover, Malta enjoys its own lawyers, whose name is legion, and their eloquence

prodigious. Law-suits abound: causes are so numerous, and often so exciting, that the Courts share with the Legislative Assembly the first esteem as popular diversions.

Indeed, there is a sense in which the two favourite amusements are one, for 'scenes' in the Assembly almost always end in suits at law. Political articles in the Press constantly land editor and author in the courts. The Maltese are 'touchy' to the last degree, and, rejoicing in the law, they resort to it whenever they get a chance. It had become quite 'the thing' before I left Malta for rival politicians to accuse one another periodically of *criminal* libel—with the delicious thrill resulting of prominent politicians' being seen *in the dock*! Needless to say, it never ended in imprisonment, but in 'scenes of popular enthusiasm' after the inevitable acquittal. Maltese politicians never forget their obligations as chief popular entertainers.

An unsuspecting Englishman may very easily get landed as a witness. It once very nearly happened to me. I was asked in a friendly way by a prominent politician to give an expert opinion on the meaning of certain English words which had trickled from the pen of a political opponent. For this purpose we went into a room, and I noticed with some surprise that there were other people present *who did not go away*. More especially there was one man, who, far from going away, came and sat at the table beside us. My guardian-angel was on the alert this time, and I resolved to be very cautious.

The words in question were as follows . . . 'The apparently pious Father Blank!' Did they, inquired my political friend, in my opinion

constitute an intention to libel? How were they to be interpreted? What would the average Englishman make of them?

I suppressed the probable comment of the average Englishman, as unsuited to clerical society, and replied that the words as they stood did not appear to me to be libellous. I admitted that they were probably not intended to conciliate. At the same time I suddenly begged my questioner to be good enough to introduce me to his 'legal friend'—by which I intended the anonymous third at the table. My politician complied, with none too good a grace.

I then remarked that all depended where the emphasis was meant to fall in the phrase. If on 'pious', then it merely expressed incredulity that so pious a man should do whatever he had done; if, however, the emphasis fell on 'apparently', then it might be taken as insinuating doubts as to the reality of that piety. But, I concluded, as neither word was in italics, we had no means of knowing where the author had intended the emphasis to fall. And with that I wished them good-day and left the room.

Need I say that a first-class libel case was shortly afterwards cooked up out of those same words? But I was *not* called as a witness.

'Our poor students' likewise frequently stanched their wounds with the balm of the law. Let us say that a 'poor student' has failed in an examination: it is not his fault—*cela va sans dire!* Over-application has resulted in dizziness on the day of the test; he knew the answer perfectly well to every question which he did not attempt. In every other subject (he avers) he passed with a superfluity of marks. He appeals to the Rector

to require the examiners to 're-read his papers' in the light of these facts Nothing doing ! He petitions the General Council to compel the Rector to require the examiners to re-read his papers: the petition, after endless discussion, is ultimately turned down. The student then pitches in an even longer petition, which meets with the same fate. What does 'our poor student' do ? He appeals to the Law of his country, and a professor of the university is briefed to plead his cause against the Rector of the university ! The Rector is put to endless trouble, there is legal botheration of every kind ; and, in the end, a judge solemnly finds for 'our poor student'. Result : 'our poor student' turns up in class one day and cheekily remarks to the professor involved, "Sir, I've won my case—I've got to be examined again !" Almost at the same moment shouts are heard *off* " *Evviva So-and-So ! Down with all tyrants !*" The professor is the tyrant, and the rector ! He has refused to be made a fool of, the Rector has supported his refusal, and the General Council has done likewise But the Law finds for 'our poor student'.

Fancy such a state of things in England. Or indeed anywhere. But in Malta it causes no special comment or surprise. The student is a hero, the professor who won the case for him a patriot. The Rector is a tyrant, the General Council has been misinformed. The student is sustained at law, and learns that nothing is impossible if you have but impudence enough.

'Our poor student !' But it will be 'our poor Malta' if this sort of thing goes on.

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CHAPTER XXII

'THE BEST BUTTER'

WHEN poor Mr. Bultitude, the hero of *Vice Versa*, was under that eclipse which forced him for a while to take his own son's place at school, there occurred a football match in which the Doctor took part. At his awful apparition, the boys naturally fell back; and the Doctor, dribbling the ball up the field, kicked a goal, and turned round to say, "Now, for which side did I score that goal?" He then retired, with a remark to the effect he must not spoil the game with his superior science.

All over the world goals are constantly being scored in the same way.

While the Wise Men at the Colonial Office were still drafting Malta's Constitution, and ere yet H.R.H. had smiled his famous smile upon the island, there came out to Malta, at the invitation of His Excellency, an English Educationalist of sorts, who was to stay at the Palace for a week or two, and place his vast knowledge of the science and systems of education at the disposal of those who would soon be called upon to administer the same in Malta.

Now, an amiable Educationalist from England has about as much relevance to the situation in Malta as I might be supposed to have to the councils of state in, say, Portugal or Korea. If such an auxiliary is to score a goal, it can only

be on condition of nobody's opposing him ; and no sooner has he left the field, than his contribution is quietly discounted.

By the same token, why are we for ever having 'Empire University Conferences' these days ? They entail a good deal of expense, and yield very doubtful results. What is all this talk about 'getting into touch' ? Does anybody really suppose that Oxford gets into touch with Malta and Hong-Kong by shaking hands once a year with delegates from those places ? The only result of such conferences is some such excitable scheme as that for an 'Empire Degree' —that is, a degree valid throughout the Empire. Heaven help us ! One wants to know a good deal more about a paper-currency than the face-value of its notes !

It would be impossible to imagine a more delightful experience than a fortnight spent in Malta's spring climate under conditions such as our Educationalist's. To visit Malta in such a way is to enjoy the consideration of royalty without royalty's satiety. The Maltese are a most hospitable and obliging people ; and, whatever may be the visitor's title to distinction, he will have the full benefit of it among them. Never have I known such a programme of festivities as was arranged for the Lady Journalists who came to Malta to help the Prince of Wales to open Malta's Parliament. . . . Queens might have envied them. Nor was the Hon. Educationalist left to mope about in corners.

Indeed, everybody was so eager to trot the visitor round their own little part of the show, that there is some fear he never quite grasped the whole. There is a general air of well-being

in Malta (especially as viewed from the windows of the Governor's car !) which might easily deceive even an Educationalist into thinking that no really serious problems could exist in such a land of sunshine. The true hospitality of the Maltese forbids them to wash their dirty linen under the eyes and nose of distinguished strangers.

Not for a moment do I imply that the main object of the Educationalist's visit was neglected. Every morning he was at the Palace closeted with local big-wigs, clerical and lay ; and, when he drove off to San Antonio with H.E., it was but to meet the academic side of Malta in friendly converse around the Governor's table. There, on broad terraces overlooking the loveliest gardens in Malta—full, O, full of flowers—would the Educationalist stroll both before and after lunch, bland as Addison in Magdalen Meadows, with some one or other of the island's light and leading.

Even I had my informal private chat with the Educationalist. . . . Or, at any rate, I was invited to lunch to be in the way of it. It was in no spirit of levity or unfaith that I turned up at the Palace, for the tension with the *studenti* did not relax, and I badly needed the advice I hoped to gain. Circumstances, however, were against me.

The day, I well remember, was one of those perfect days of Malta's spring, when the breeze stirs light from some Sirocco-less quarter, and the sun is of an adorable gaiety. 'A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot ! ' . . . So, I am sure, thought the happy (almost frisky) Educationalist, as he paced the stone paths and mounted the broad steps of San Antonio. He was in Malta for only a fortnight, guest of the Governor, fortunate in his weather, courted and flattered on

every side, enjoying every minute of each day: what should he know of statutes and *studenti*, of houses in Sliema, of breathless autumn Siroccos, of weary marking time at dead-ends of obstruction and frustration? I was glum, and 'sick of an old sorrow'.... Our moods clashed. I think he guessed that a private talk with me would assort but ill with the racy sunshine, the blaze of creeper, the delicate tendrils of early flowers. 'Yond Cassius hath a lean and hungry look!'.... The Educationalist, like Cæsar, preferred 'men that are fat, sleek-headed men'.

I thought, after that, I had seen all I should see of the island's guest, but a day or two later I received an invitation to confer with him at the Palace of Valletta; and I am never likely to forget the conference which followed. The Maltese are portentously non-committal; no schoolboys being 'jawed' were ever less responsive or more apparently attentive. We all sat solemnly and heavily at a round table, some sixteen of us—like King Arthur's privy council—while the Educationalist performed a sword-dance, with Malta's two vital education problems representing the swords, which, as an expert dancer, he must never on any account touch! I was lost in wonder and admiration at his almost uncanny skill: no longer did I feel the least astonishment at his having risen to the rank he held in England. He should have been Minister of Education! Easy, delightful, deprecating, *debonair*, he 'chin-wagged' for a solid hour, giving to truisms almost an *éclat*, and to platitudes the ripe aroma of long experience. He had a voice which can properly be described as 'mellifluous'; he flowed with milk and honey like the Promised

Land. Like those of the 'Aged, aged man' in 'Alice', 'his answers trickled through my head like water through a sieve.' There was something narcotic about his whole personality; like aspirin, he paralysed the head. After a while I began to believe in a vague, lost way that I had been listening to his voice for ever.

Now, there are in Malta just precisely two educational problems: neither of which, any more than the Mad Hatter's watch, yields to treatment by butter. These problems are (1) Language, and (2) Finance. Are the Maltese going to aim at equipping their people efficiently and economically for emigration and the labour market? Or are they going to aim at gratifying factional prejudice at home? These are the issues.

But the visiting Educationalist had got to score his goal, and we all stood out of his way while he dribbled the ball up the field and let fly at the posts. It mattered nothing that the posts he let fly at were quite off the field.

It was, of course, a great pleasure to him to come and chat with us gentlemen in this informal friendly sort of way; but we were not on any account to think that here was a chap from England come to tell us how to do our job. It was only that . . . Well, he *had* had a little experience, and he did so want to help *if he could*. He was by no means sure that he could help. Still, he too belonged to a small country (small country mentioned), and, therefore, perhaps he had a special tenderness for small countries. Might it not be so? He knew, none better, what stuff was in small countries! . . . Often they set an example to big countries.

Shutting my eyes, I could almost imagine

myself a Bombayan, hearing Lord Reading tell how he too was of the East, and might, therefore, be able to auscultate the yearnings of India's immemorial heart, even without a stethoscope.

Now, gentlemen, about this business which we were met here this morning to discuss. . . . We could well imagine with what diffidence he spoke. Malta was about to join the great free commonwealth of British nations as a self-governing unit (he congratulated Malta with all his heart). . . . But this would mean that in a little while there would be a—shall we say, Minister? and it would be for this—shall we say, Minister? to decide as to everything. None could realise that more fully than he. . . . He knew what ministers are!

No words can describe the glumness of the audience while the stream of talk flowed on. The only response was a periodic movement of all the heads at once: not exactly a nod, or yet a shake: but like the ponderous swing of iron chains which some passing child has set in motion. The movement, once set going (as at this reference to the—shall we say, Minister?), did not so much stop as slowly dwindle away.

But what about these schools of ours in Malta—these places of education, elementary, secondary, university? We all had education at heart: it was the great cause, the foremost ideal, of the age in which we lived. How to give our children, the rising generation, the best possible chance in the battle of life?

What the speaker's suggestions boiled down to in the end was this—Could we not arrange to teach our Maltese children national folk-lore and traditional dancing? Could we not get our

teachers to work up the local interest—flora and fauna, etc.? It had been found to answer so admirably in this and that and the other place; it acted as a stimulus to the patriotism of the children—and what, after all, *was* patriotism but the love of home? It encouraged their powers of observation, and fostered a healthy rivalry between the various localities. As he had motored around the island (what a beautiful place!) with our Governor, his eye had been caught again and again by little villages ('casals', didn't we call them?) which, he knew, must have each its own story, its own customs; each its band of bright-eyed kiddies with minds opening eagerly to the wonders of the world around them; and each its staff of efficient teachers, loving their noble calling, and wanting nothing so much as to store those opening minds with wholesome, with nourishing, with *practical* knowledge.

He ceased: and for a long time there was complete silence. I think we were all trying to get the honey out of our hair. We were to ask questions—put posers—fire away—have no mercy on him! But what was there to question him about? I did think of asking him whether he liked cheese. . . . It seemed so relevant, somehow.

Mr. Chesterton's 'Basil Grant', while a judge upon the bench, once summed up a long and complicated suit at law, as follows:—

" Highty-tighty-tiddly-ighty,
Tiddly-ighty tiddly-ighty,
Highty-tighty tiddly-ighty
Tiddly-ighty igh!"

Whereupon he left the bench, and never returned to it.

I admired the Maltese at that moment: they were so admirably serious. As when the speaker at a school prize-giving tells the boys to 'try, try, try again,' there is a ripple of applause, so when the Educationalist had done telling these Maltese to work up the local folk-lore, of which there isn't a particle, a look of grave consideration came over each face. For all the excitability of the south, nothing can exceed its impassivity on occasion. I remember being much impressed by the quietness, almost the indifference, of the crowd which gathered under the windows of the Palace to hear the formal announcement of Malta's constitution; most of its members pretty well knew, I suppose, that no such instrument could make much difference to the really relevant problems of their laborious lives. The Maltese who really cared for the announcement, the 'patriots', were all in the Palace itself; while their wives and daughters waved handkerchiefs from the roof of the Garrison Library opposite. Otherwise, among the lower classes, the news of Malta's enfranchisement did not create half the popular excitement which St. Joseph inspires on his Festa every year.

Well, a few questions were put—and mellifluously answered, with infinite deprecation. I plucked up heart to ask how much time the Educationalist thought there would be for folk-lore and dancing, after the children had got outside their daily dose of English and Italian. This was a fearful brick, and really created a stir. But an elderly patriot, sitting opposite, adroitly changed the subject—with a glance through his glasses at me!

"Well, gentlemen," said the Educationalist, a

little later, "I don't know if *you've* enjoyed our little chat, but I know *I* have! But—I'm *afraid* now His Excellency will be waiting to take me off to lunch. . . ."

As the March Hare said, 'It was the *Best* Butter!'

CHAPTER XXIII

TITTLE-TATTLE

EXHAUSTED with speculations as to the race and relationships of the Maltese, one turns with relief to the doings of the English on the island. Here at least there is no dispute: everybody knows that an Englishman is a mixed product, having 'cultural affinities' with half the nations of Europe. As for his presence in Malta, it is owing, of course, to the 'Amor Melitensium' and the 'Vox Europae'—and still more perhaps to the fact that the island is a convenient naval and military base.

Anglo-Maltese society is an affair of cliques; the boundaries within which the various social games may be played are as clearly marked out as a tennis-court. Everybody lives so close to everybody else, that, but for these boundaries, the game would become exhausting. The rule is, to know the people you *must* know, entertain the people you *must* entertain, and let the rest rip.

Our own social position among the English of the island was something of an anomaly; there was no ready-made circle for us, and our acquaintance was always a patch-work affair, made up of this member of that circle, and that member of this. No boundary was ever bulged out so as to include us officially. As a rule, our 'service' acquaintance consisted of auxiliaries, doctors, naval engineers, education officers, padres,

and so on. A fair analogy of my social position in Malta among the English would be that of a 19th century private tutor: a person who has undoubtedly been to the university, but is somehow associated with the governess; who comes down to dinner indeed, but is not expected to say much when there. I felt like Louis Moore among the Simpsons in 'Shirley'.

It is on the whole the fashion in the 'Services' to pretend to be brainless—though many men in both services are nothing of the kind; the culture prevailing is that of junior school-boys, among whom intellectual attainments are regarded as rather funny and distinctly compromising. In Malta, where the Services are lord of all, the fashionable note to strike is a gin-drinking, Marsamad, polo-playing, pony-racing one: if you have a light of any kind, you *must* put it under a bushel; to stick it in a candlestick would be to flout tradition. If, for instance, you know any history, pretend you don't; if you are fond of music, pretend you aren't; if you are well-read, pretend you never read anything but the *Sporting Times* while having your hair cut. Never let on that you know anything, for perhaps a senior officer is present who does *not* know anything. But never miss any fixture at the Marsa (the Service Sports' ground), be present at every dance, drink a number of pink gins before dinner, and you will be regarded as a good cheery fellow with no side.

This, unfortunately, is the culture we present to the Maltese; wherefore, is it any great wonder that the ones with brains proclaim a 'cultural affinity' with Italy? No southern people can understand this entire devotion to sport. As my

friend, Mifsud Bonnici, said to me: "I should make a very poor imitation of an Englishman, but Italian comes naturally to me." He meant that the mentality of the English he saw was beyond him, but that of the Italians in their cities was well within his grasp. This, of course, is the able young man we did *not* send to Oxford!

'Service' life is so different from the ordinary thing that one cannot judge it by the same standards. That strict and rigid subordination (extending to the women) of junior to senior does not exist outside the Services; but it exists to that extent *in* the Services that they do not know what to make of you if you are not of them. You are young: very well, your place is with the subalterns. . . . But you are held to be intellectual: your place then is emphatically *not* with the subalterns. 'Where the deuce *is* your beastly place? Here, clear out of this!

The 'Services' do not know what to make of those who do not belong to them, and, naturally enough, they get out of the difficulty by leaving such people alone. This, in a country where practically all one's own people are 'Service', is rather lonely for the odd man out. One can quite see how, in a country like Germany before the war, where civilians were always inferior to military ranks, society must have tended to curdle and stagnate. There seems to be something about the military life which disposes those that follow it to the narrow mind and exclusive temper; and this disposition has not far to seek for its affinities in marriage. I simply do not know how a garrison contrives to keep it up—the ceaseless, unvarying round of identical dissipations. With

sailors, it is more understandable, since they are often away at sea; but soldiers, except for blessed interludes of active service, are at it the whole time.

Never have I seen a set of men so pitifully bored as the R.A.M.C. Mess at Imtarfa during a recent Near Eastern crisis. These men, to the number of (say) sixteen, had been run out to Malta to be in readiness for the casualties which might soon be arriving; and the War Office had shown a perfectly uncanny skill in rounding up for the emergency a collection of very recent husbands, very recent fathers, and very recent returns from India. There they all were, high and dry on the rock of Imtarfa, seven miles away from even so much as Valletta—with absolutely nothing at all to do. It was a sight to wring tears from a stone, these hapless medicos seated at mess, in beautiful blue and red uniforms, gloomily drinking the King's health and cursing the health of everybody else. How eagerly they clutched at baseless rumours (unworthy of science!) concerning mysterious transports putting in empty at Malta for no assignable cause! Some vaccinated themselves to pass the time, and watched the vesicles form as a prisoner might watch a mouse. One went into hospital for a slight operation on his toe, and another performed it! . . . And so two were made briefly happy. One, the luckiest, was a geologist, and bounded pneumatically over the island in quest of rocks and stones. But it was quite a little sight in the afternoon to see the medicos coming down the hill from Imtarfa in dreary straggling crocodile, and boarding the tiny train at the station with mutual aversion and utter staleness stamped on every brow. In

the evening, again, they would be returning, at the same time as myself—after their tea and the papers at the Union Club—and by this time they were often in an interesting pathological condition of perambulatory coma, without a word to throw at a dog. I was the dog they did not throw one at.

I have known very many delightful people in Malta, and yet it often struck me that no Englishman is quite himself in those surroundings. Everybody is just a little fundamentally exasperated, and apt to be looking round for cause of offence, which, in a place where talk is all of the inbred variety known as gossip, is seldom far to seek. Whether this is owing to the climate, or to the landscape, of the island, I cannot determine; probably to a bit of both; everybody's temperature seems a point or two above normal, everybody is always a little 'accidental and enforced'.

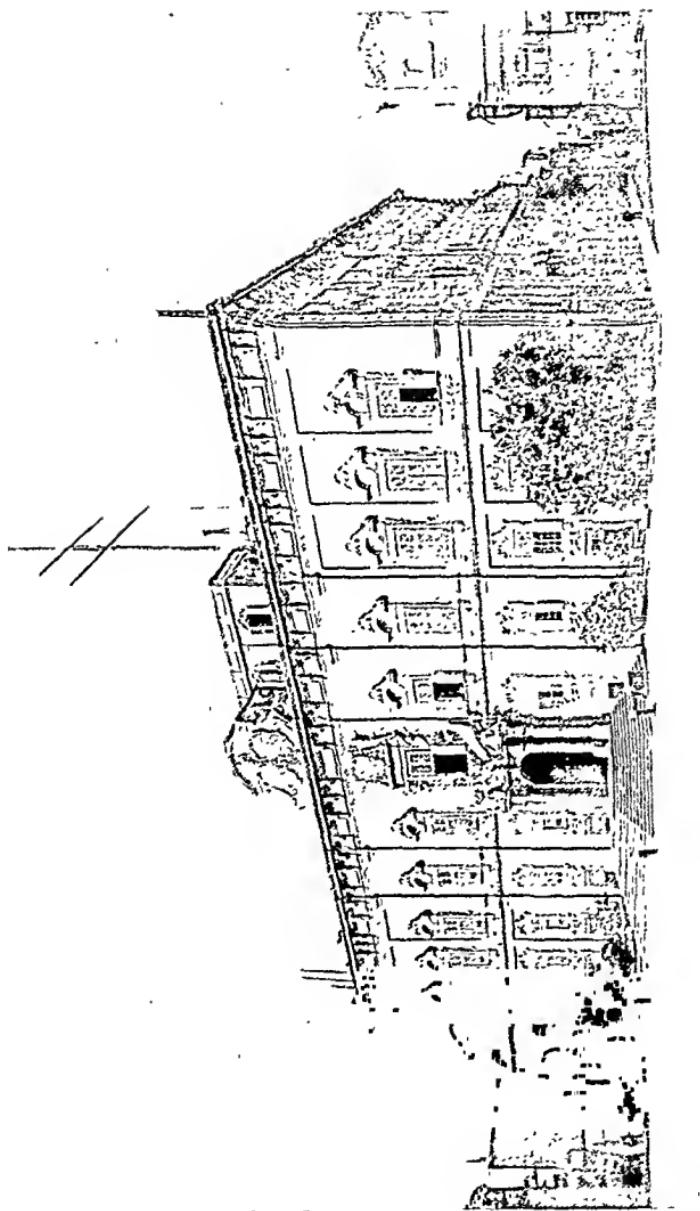
In spite of the smallness of the island, it is a great fag getting about, and weeks often elapse between visits to and from ones friends. From Valletta to Sliema by steam-launch across the harbour is certainly not far, and yet it is far enough to sunder the dwellers in the two places. As for Notabile, where we latterly lived, Edinburgh is hardly a further cry from London than Notabile from Valletta! There is only the little train to come out by, except for carozzis—and the time-table is so arranged as to make evening visiting, the pleasantest kind, impossible.

Valletta is, of course, the centre of festivity. The Union Club, with its Ladies' Annexe, is there; and the Opera House; and Valletta is most conveniently situated for the Marsa or sports'

ground. Many Service men in Malta know nothing of the island but the way from the Union Club to the Marsa. The Union Club itself is a well-run place (civilians are 'tolerated' quite generously), housed in gorgeous premises, consisting of one of the old *auberges* of the Knights of St. John. Many of these *auberges* are in military possession: notably, the beautiful 'Auberge de Castile', which is the garrison headquarters. Conversation in the Union Club, especially at the popular 'Lower Bar', may be adequately represented by the one word 'Marsa'; and for scandal you must go next door, to the Ladies' Annexe, where the ladies drink cocktails and ceaselessly talk it.

Nowhere more than in Malta is what Kipling has said so true, that 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male'. Some of the manners to be seen in the Ladies' Annexe are definitely frightening; there is a primitive savagery about the insolence of some women which no man can handle. If men among men are very like small boys, women among women are no less like schoolgirls: once, in this Ladies' Annexe, an ineffable female was staring pointedly at a newcomer through a lorgnette, whereupon the victim speared a horse-shoe roll with a fork and returned the stare. Can anybody wonder that the Maltese look towards Italy?

My own worst experience in the Ladies' Annexe was once when I timidly called there to rescue my wife. She was just finishing a letter at a table. Beside her, sprawling in a chair and leaning half across the same table, was a Lady. "Are you coming?" somebody bawled to this Lady across the room. "No," shouted back the Lady, "I've



THE AUBERGE DE CASTILLE.

(Now the headquarters of the garrison in Malta)

been waiting *hours* for this table, and it looks as if I were going to get it at last!" Comment is useless: we crept away, 'our nerves in their infancy again'.

The English in Malta get furious over the noise the Maltese make in the narrow cliff-like streets at night. Even in fashionable Strada Mezzodi, on summer evenings the basements give up their toilers, and lively conversations in Maltese are shouted from kerb to kerb. But my experience was that the English are pots calling the kettle black: often and often we have been waked up long past midnight by English revellers shouting humorous valedictions and plans for to-morrow from the street up to top-storey flats. Gramophones go at all hours, and refractory cars are cranked up with devastating tumult. I do not see what the Maltese are to learn from these manners, except to show no compunction. Did the English always behave with courtesy and consideration, they would seldom fail to find it in the Maltese. The average Maltese peasant has beautiful natural manners, and the carozzi-drivers in Mezzodi were a lesson to the whole place.

I shall never forget when our baby was born, as he was while we had a flat in Mezzodi; the sympathy of these carozzi-drivers was inexpressible. The looks of concern on their nice faces as I sped off to fetch the nurse will remain a grateful memory with me for ever; and in the hours which followed, when I roamed the streets disconsolate, their smiles and touched hats and little shy bows cheered me a great deal. Long afterwards, I never passed one of these men without hearing a murmured 'Lady all right—

yes ? ' And the pride of the one chosen to convey us to the place of christening was a most lovely human thing. Yet I seldom employed these men ; and their friendliness was solely due to the smile and salute I always exchanged with them in coming and going. If the manners in the Ladies' Annexe were terrifying, those of the carozzi-drivers in Mezzodi were reassuring ; if the former humiliated humanity, the latter exalted it.

If all the Maltese were like the peasants, Malta would be a pleasant place. If 'our poor students' would learn of the carozzi-drivers, the university would flourish.

A great social feature of Malta in the winter is the Opera season, which begins in November and ends in May. The Opera House in Valletta is an exceedingly fine one, and good Italian companies are secured. The Maltese rejoice in opera—in Italian opera ; they have little use for German music. The English likewise frequent the Opera, often (the men) with rueful looks. But it is 'the thing' to go, and Nelson's famous signal is remembered. Hence the most unmusical of hard-bitten old colonels may be seen having his savage breast soothed with great regularity once a week. But if the music is often a bore, the intervals are a delight ; for then ' fair women and brave men ' foregather in the entresol with mutual satisfaction, and the limited conversational course is cantered round again. The men in dress-uniforms, and the women in their most fetching gowns, make a gay scene of the opera ; H.E. is often in the royal box, the Admiral in his, with parties which they have just entertained at their respective palaces.

The Maltese, in so far as my students represent

their tastes, still regard Italy as the unassailable home of the fine arts. Did they really think, I asked them, that the Italians still led the way in music? And they replied, but of course! . . . The Germans were but uncouth twisters and squirmers after the elegance of Italy. I ceased to wonder that English poetry seems a poor thing to Maltese tastes.

I have made a bit of a joke of the 'cultural affinity' of the Maltese with the Italians. Naturally: for this affinity was made into a stick for my back, in respect of many matters which had nothing to do with culture, but rather with the lack of it. I admit freely, however, that in very many ways the Maltese feel much more at home with Italians than with ourselves. The Maltese, for example, gesticulate in their speech as the Italians do, and they find our modes of expression very tame and colourless. They think oratory without gymnastics a very tame affair: in a Maltese pulpit an English preacher would command no attention at all. The Italian or Sicilian special-preachers, that they have over to harrow their souls in Lent, are very hot stuff indeed: a well-built pulpit is required for such a one—and it must stand well away from the wall, lest the orator in his wild clutchings and clenches should injure his hand. These Lenten sermons last sometimes for upwards of two hours, during the whole of which time the preacher is taking violent physical exercise, analogous to conducting an orchestra and dancing the Highland Fling at one and the same time. If this is the sort of exhortation which penetrates to the Maltese soul, small wonder that English sounds uninspiring!

The contrast between the two languages, English and Italian, was very striking at University Faculty Meetings. It so happened that the English-speaking Maltese on the Faculty of Literature and Science spoke the language 'as it is spoke'—that is, quietly, rather coldly, tentatively, with a sub-flavour of irony. The alternation of English *speaker* and Italian *orator* used to remind me of the whirlwind and thunder, followed by the 'still, small voice'. Italian is held to be a beautiful tongue, and no doubt it is; but I think that, like the Scots bagpipes, it is perhaps better in the open air.

There is a story of a Scotsman who lay dying in an English hospital. "Is there anything we can do for you?" asked the house-surgeon; "is there anything you would like?" "Yes," replied the patient in a faint voice, "a'm thinking that if a' could get hearing the pipes just once again, a' would be dying happy!" So a piper was procured from somewhere, and he promenaded the corridor for some time, playing beautiful sprigs and tremolos. "Is the Scotsman dead?" inquired the surgeon of the nurse in the morning. "No, doctor," was the reply, "but all the English patients are!"

I felt not a little like that about Italian in Malta. If Signor Mufti and I lay side by side in a hospital, he no doubt would recover if 'melodious Tuscan' were spoken in his ear. . . . But I think I should die!

Again, Maltese taste is all for Italy in poetry. They like something with a hard, clear outline, something tangible and propositional. When Dante tells them of the *Damnati* up to the neck in bitter, stinking water, they feel that there is

a real poetic conception ; but when Keats tells them—

“ Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter. . . . ”

They are not at all comfortable about it in their minds, and only hope that so dubious a proposition will not ‘lurk’ them in an examination-paper. If you asked them—

“ O Cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice ? ”

they would rejoin with one voice ‘Bird !’ and be puzzled when you did not seem too pleased. The ‘Ancient Mariner’ worried my students fearfully, for (rather a tribute to Coleridge !) it reads so circumstantially that they did not know whether to believe it or not.

Yes, Dante is the man for the Maltese : Dante, with his savage political animosities and merciless logic flowing in melody of unnumbered open vowels : Dante, with his hard outline, clear and coloured like a southern wall against the sky : Dante, with his bias towards propositions. It is not at all surprising that German music makes little appeal to their ears, or that English poetry strikes them as misty and aggravating.

Except in the very highest circles, the English and the Maltese do not mix a great deal. They have but little to say to one another, and are ill at ease together. Service manners and customs do not appeal to the Maltese, and still less do Maltese to the Services. The Maltese never see the Englishman as he largely is in his own country, and seldom come within hearing of his real culture.

Personally, I went out to Malta with indignation

in my heart against what I had heard of the English treatment of the Maltese, and with a rather self-righteous and sentimental determination to stand by the natives. It was their country. . . Who were we, etc.? But I had not been in Malta a week before I was thanking heaven that the Union Club is not open to Maltese! This is no sort of reflection upon them; it is just that, in the unfamiliar climate and surroundings, one craves now and then to get right away—to escape into a semblance at least of one's own country. Life among a strange people—and more especially when your job brings you up against them intimately and constantly—is a real strain; and the English are right on psychological grounds in excluding Maltese from the membership of the English Club. Their doing so has led to much local indignation, and the *Casino Maltese* has riposted by excluding members of the Union Club; but how much better to face the facts!.. Which simply are, that club-manners differ widely among different peoples, and that to mix nationalities, except on special occasions, is to defeat the whole purpose of a club. Many Governors have tried, mistakenly, in my opinion, to get these rules relaxed; but nothing has come of it, except discomfiture. Nothing will come of it. Besides, are not the English entitled to at least one private place upon the island?

I was taken several times into the Casino or Maltese Club. It is a fine place, well appointed and full of light; and the members are good fellows, cordial and obliging. The atmosphere of the place is probably pleasanter than that of the Union Club—at least, to a civilian; but . . . the two places are utterly different. The whole

situation may be summed up in the luminous words (which I quote from memory) of the 'Cheshire Cat' in 'Alice' . . . "A dog," said the Cheshire Cat to Alice, "wags its tail when it's pleased, and I wag mine when I'm angry: we are both mad!" That is exactly it: club prejudice is a sort of genial mania, there is no accounting for it, but it exists and cannot be ignored. The English take off hats on entering club premises, the Maltese keep theirs on. . . . Both mad! It is simply a case of two incompatible forms of harmless lunacy. . . . So why bother about it?

But, on the whole, English manners towards the Maltese are unsympathetic and unintelligent. They are based on our usual assumption that the peoples subject to our sway—Indians, Egyptians, Maltese—are in their infancy; whereas the truth rather is, they are old—very old. It may be because they are old, not because they are young, that they cannot dance to our piping, and will not feast as we feast: perhaps we should get on better with them if we thought of them as 'Grandfather, old dear' rather than as 'Tommy, my boy'! We are young ourselves, as time goes on this planet; young, and very sure, in the manner of youth, that our ways are best—as they are, for us. But the Sirocco has blown for countless ages over this people, and perhaps the refrain which sounds deeply under the shrillness of their quarrels, is that of the old ballad:—

" Make my bed soon, for I am weary and spent,
And fain would lie down."

CHAPTER XXIV

TITLE-TATTLE

AS there is a peasantry in Malta, and a clergy, both on medieval lines, so too there is a nobility with the most romantic-sounding titles. The picture presented by the two former would indeed be incomplete without the last, for, where you have the 'simple peasant' and the 'kindly priest', there you must likewise have 'my Lord' to acknowledge the touched forelock of the one and contribute to the good works of the other.

I do not know what the peasantry thinks of titles; probably, that they are of the nature of things in a perplexing and laborious world. But the clergy has been, and is, as a rule, strongly in favour of a secular hierarchy, as favouring the established order of society, as witnessing to the divine ordinance of due degrees, and, lastly, as keeping their own lordly designations in countenance. Ecclesiastical flourishes and styles sound rather ridiculous in countries such as the United States, where no secular titles exist.

There are titles, of course, and titles. There are patents of great antiquity deriving from martial services rendered to kings and emperors and from the immemorial ownership of land, and there are patents of yesterday or thereabouts deriving from the Pope. The Pope can make you a *duce*, *marquese* or *conte*, if *he* likes and if *you*

like ; and you may style yourself after any of these fashions wherever the papal *imprimatur* is valid. The Pope is a sovereign no less than King George ; and there is no disputing his right, as sovereign in the Vatican, to confer where he will the feudal lordship of oil-cloth squares within his jurisdiction. What, however, the papal nobleman can seldom do is to get his title accepted at face-value among his peers of the landed type. Not even in staunchly catholic Malta do papal titles count for very much : in fact, when the Pope lost his power to crown the Emperor, when indeed there ceased to be an emperor for the Pope to crown, his dukedoms, marquises and counties began to slump.

In Malta, where the two sorts of title flourish together like the cockle and the wheat, it is of importance to be accurately informed as to the date and derivation of ' handles ' to the name. As a rule, the more imposing the style, the more likely it is to refer to some landed estate of papal oil-cloth. Beware, for instance, of ' Dukes ! ' . . . And do not address them as ' Your Grace ' ; they are not used to it, and it makes them shy. If you consult Debrett, you will find there the style and standing of all genuine Maltese nobles, together with the order of their going at the Court of St. James. These are the people who really count as nobles in Malta.

The Maltese aristocracy comports itself after the continental, rather than the English model ; it consists for the most part of pleasant, unassuming people of genuine fine breeding. They are not snobs. They have an order of going, valid before the Lord Chamberlain, but they do not stand upon it so as to block the traffic. Their

pedigree is often a lengthy tail, but it does not get between the legs when out walking. They are able to feel the pea through all seven mattresses, but it does not keep them awake at night. Though they are not really *ci-devant*; in the Revolutionary sense, they behave rather as if they were; and thus combine the advantages of the commoner with the coronet of the noble. Many are cultivated and delightful people, and the villas, palazzos and casas, where they maintain their state, are things of beauty and joys for ever.

Of course, like all true nobles, they sniff a little at one another. That is probably how these fine aristocratic noses have come about all the world over—through sniffing! But what is this more than to say that their social life includes every human charm? A title would indeed be a poor thing if it gave the possessor no feeling of superiority at all. No Maltese Bohun or Vere de Vere need be without this healthful stimulus; there are always the 'papals' to smile at (just as we smile at soap-boiling baronets and peers), and there are doubtful patents to treat with a slightly satirical punctilio.

Some Maltese titles are very fine-sounding. Let us take, for example, a Most Noble Count of Inguadamerrua! One wonders pleasantly where 'Inguadamerrua' is, and for what knightly feat of arms the title was conferred on the first holder of it? One imagines some long-defunct Pontiff, pausing ere he affix St. Peter's Seal to some Bull or Brief, and saying to his 'assembled cardinals, "But what will our Most Noble Child of Inguadamerrua have to say to this?" . . . Or the Emperor mightily smiting his armoured thigh as he exclaims to the Electors around him, "By

my halidom, but for this stay of Inguadameruua
ere close of day we should have sacked the town!"

But the plight of the noble in Malta to-day is often a sad one; they are so very noble, and so very poor. It is very hard on the younger members of such families: *noblesse oblige*—but to what? It is the old difficulty . . . education! How are they to get educated as becomes their rank unless they go abroad? And how are they to go abroad unless they are rich?

If the English Jesuits could see their way to return to Malta, the nobles at least would be glad. Their skins are not sacrosanct, and they would cheerfully endure both ferula and birch if doing so would give well-born Malta the education it desires. It is notable indeed how all the world over the nobles still offer their backs to the salutary scourge, while the 'hoi polloi' are up in arms at the mere swish of it. But the nobles of Malta would welcome anything in the cause of education, and—*they would answer to treatment!* They are well worth educating. If the English Jesuits went back they would get the best of the island, and, as I said before, the leaven of the rod would soon be working in public life.

Saint Ignatius, please note!

So much for the holders of titles. . . . Now a word or two should be said of the palaces where they abide.

There are many houses in Malta as fine as any to be seen in Europe. One could wish they are better to be *seen* in Malta! . . . But often they are huddled in among lesser buildings, within the strait girdle of protecting walls.

You enter one such, let us say, by an immense

doorway, under which a plumed knight might ride on his charger, but opening off a little side-street, hardly more than an alley. Perhaps the doorway has beautiful knockers of Florentine workmanship, worthy of Cellini at his best. . . . There were two of these on a noble house near us in Notabile, and so beautiful that no visitor ever came without hatching schemes for removing them privily under cloak of night. One man said of them that they were the only things in all Malta which he really coveted.

The outer portal passed, you find yourself as a rule in a pleasant courtyard full of palms and other green things, and with a glimpse through a further gate of a charming garden. Thence you are conducted, through several gates of woven metal, up a staircase. Once upstairs, if your guide should leave you for but a moment, you were as utterly lost and cast away as in the wildest forests of pathless Africa ! You might wander about those corridors, and in and out of those vast chambers, for a week on end, and never recover your tracks. Or so it seems.

Only in the Vatican Galleries have I ever been similarly overcome by indoor distances. There, indeed, you look along a corridor, and your spirit faints ; not until they run tramways down these interior vistas will you see what is at the other end. Talk about the 'Prisoner of the Vatican ! ' . . . The Pope has only to visit his own galleries to get all, and more than all, the exercise an elderly man can require. As for some of these Maltese palaces, delicate people on Sirocco days might well fall exhausted between parlour and dining-room ! Is this perhaps the origin of a drink before dinner ?

Some of these houses have other points in common with the Vatican ; they are hardly less museums of interesting things. Personally, though I like well to enter and behold, I could no more live among such a collection of valuables than I could live in the British Museum. If I owned such an Ali Baba's Cave of treasures, I should develop a counting mania, I should become a catalogue fiend ; I should wake up in the night with acute melancholia, attended by the terrifying symptom of loud owl-like hootings. Even a portrait-gallery of one's ancestors would be bad enough, but Venetian glass, curios, cameos, miniatures, trinkets, china, complete sets of this and early examples of that, would drive me to a chalet in the Alps, there to live with a deal table, two chairs and a bed !

But the Maltese who own such accumulations seem to live among them very comfortably, and, as I can testify, very hospitably and agreeably.

Once I stayed for a few days in just such a house in England. It was a picture-gallery, museum and conservatory, combined. And, *O vanitas vanitatum !* the only thing the owner really cared for in all that vast collection of ancestral heirlooms was a very third-rate collection of moths and butterflies, which he had made with his own net ! All the other things he had merely inherited, this he had achieved.

I think some of the younger members of noble Maltese families would sympathise and understand.

Saint Ignatius, please note !

CHAPTER XXV.

‘ FIOR DEL MONDO ’

THE Maltese are apt to lay it on with a trowel when speaking of the goodness of providence to ‘ Our Island ’. The mere fact that they call Malta ‘ fior del mondo ’ or ‘ flower of the world ’ may serve as a sufficient indication of their tendency in this respect. But, as much that is most admirable on the island is connected with its husbandry, it would be highly unfair to devote no space to the general outward aspect of the rock which is Malta.

The fact is, that Malta’s scenery is likely to be an acquired taste. In little bits it is charming, in broad prospects it is sometimes little short of devastating—at any rate to an English eye. If it be genuinely like parts of Palestine and Syria, as it is said to be, then one wonders the more at the poetry of David—and less at the flippancy of the Emperor Frederick II, who enraged the Pope by remarking after a crusade that, if God had known about Sicily, he never would have chosen Palestine as the abode of his Chosen People !

Malta, then, is an acquired taste, but, like many such tastes, once acquired, it sticks. The usual sense of disappointment on a first view of it is due to ones having expected a little grove of Sicily floating further south, whereas the reality is a bit of North Africa’s burnt biscuit



THE PORT OF MIGIARRO, GOZO
(The landscape is typical of the Maltese Islands.)

[Facing page 200]

drifted out to sea. Nowhere rising to any height, the island is treeless and rugged ; and the tiny fields are so pent up within their walls of loose-piled stones that the green of the springing crops is hardly visible. Only in Gozo, where the land undulates steeply, is the eye ever rested on green or roused by the deep crimson of the cultivated clover. A flying-officer told me that in the spring Malta looks quite verdant from the air, but on the level it looks then, as at all other seasons, like heaps and heaps of systematic dilapidation. From the windows of our first house, in Sliema, there was to be seen across the waters of the bay the rising slope of a hill, and we used to tell one another how the sight of that would cheer us up when the autumn rains had made it green ; but the autumn rains never did make it green, for what we saw was not the earth, but gradations of stone walls enclosing the earth.

The absence of trees in Malta is terrible to the English eye. Except for the ubiquitous carob, the olive, the fig, and one or two gnarled and sapless species whereof I do not know the name, trees simply do not exist in Malta : only in sheltered Boschetto are deciduous trees to be seen in any number. Indeed, the Maltese themselves seem to have a definite prejudice against trees, so much so that, when it was first proposed to plant out a part of Florian with the exceedingly well-spaced groves at present to be seen there, objection was raised on the grounds that the resulting afforestation would provide harbourage for bandits ! Orange-groves there are in Malta in plenty, but they do not affect the landscape, for they are mostly in gardens enclosed behind high walls.

Nothing in Malta is more delightful than the

many beautiful eastern gardens, which hide away behind their walls with such perfect seclusion, that one might pass beside one of them every day and never dream of its existence, until let into the secret, through some tunnel-passage, by someone who knows. Here are orange-groves indeed, and oranges; and trellises of vine, and the griseous olive; and here are shady terraces of ilex with old urns upon them, and paved paths leading to fountains. To come into such a pleasure from the hot glare of the streets is like passing from torment to beatitude.

The predominant colour of Malta, houses and all, is the vivid yellow of the local stone, which pays back the fierce glare of the summer sun at compound interest. If you do not wear dark green glasses, you may easily be smitten with a sort of snow-blindness. The island is indeed nothing but a great stone flung in the sea; and its amazing fertilisation by countless generations of obscure peasant toilers is just such a piece of anonymous history as would have delighted Carlyle. Here, in this heroic achievement of industrious ages, is the true and undying glory of Malta: each one of the myriad tiny fields, clinging somehow to its surface of sheer rock, the precious earth banked in with hewings of the same, is a victory as fine as any over the Turk, and in their husbandry the Maltese may justly boast themselves an unconquered people. The crops wrested from these handkerchief patches of sparse soil would bring our husbandmen out in a sweat only to think of; the harvests which the fields are coaxed into yielding are scarcely less marvellous than the fields themselves. On the hottest of July days I have seen old women going

backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, from a stone-well to a cabbage-patch, carrying for each cabbage in turn an old kerosene tin full of water.

Scenes such as the 'Angelus' and the 'Gleaners' of Millet abound in Malta, in stark silhouette against a banner-blue of sky or a butter-yellow of rock; and implements are still in use of so primitive a pattern that they may have been the type laid up in the Ark. I have seen ploughs and harrows lying in fields, and household utensils outside farmhouse doors, which would not have looked strange to Moses.

Here is an impression of inland Malta, taken from a favourite walk of ours when we lived in Notabile. We are in a shallow valley, the way strewn with rocks and stones, the walls rising sheer on either hand, with fig-trees overhanging them, and vines trailing downward from hidden vineyards. The sky is a narrow strip of intense blue.

A bend of the valley reveals a yellow bridge, with the sky under its arch. The way becomes smoother, and one is involved among herds of grazing goats, with brown-legged goatherds in blue shirts and white knickers who stand motionless in a trance of stares. Forests of giant pampas-grass rise beside the way, and there are mortal writhings of prickly-pear.

Clambering up on to the bridge and taking a seat on its hot balustrade, one looks around upon inland Malta. The higher ground is glowing deep red with rich purple shadows, for it is evening; opposite is a low ridge of hills, the colour almost of buttercups, and seeming to have grown out by a natural process into the line of flat roofs

which crowns it. The cool grey of olive-groves is a rest to the eye, and the vital green of young vines. Jungles of prickly-pear rear up behind walls ; pampas stands tall in the valley with goats nibbling at the roots ; carobs dot the landscape far and near ; and fig-trees poke out silver boughs hung with large smooth leaves. Far off along the white winding road is a belfried chapel standing quite alone, curt against the full glow of the deepening west.

We used to call this valley the 'Vale of Goshen', and on a smaller scale it may have been not unlike. Certainly, it was Biblical ; nothing would have surprised one less than to see John the Baptist rise up, lean and formidable, among the wild locusts and savage rocks against a background of sky.

Indeed, sometimes in Malta, in the climbing village streets, with their smooth house-walls, their shuttered windows, their flat roofs—with their strange noon-silence in the glare of the sun and under the oppression of the hard blue sky—one might almost have thought to meet the Christ Himself, stirring the thick dust with His homeless feet, as He led His retinue of Twelve. . . . So entire is the illusion of Galilee !

One might even reconstruct the Gospel story in a setting of Malta, whereby indeed it would become almost terribly real. Christ, a poor Maltese peasant from an inland village, loved and trusted by the simple people, even while they murmured and wondered, and followed half-doubtfully by a few. Then Valletta (which many of the peasants have never visited) might stand for Jerusalem, with its teeming lawyers, its prelates and its priests. Then, realising how

inevitably the matter must end at the Palace, one might picture the perplexity of our Governor, honest man ! and feel a new sympathy for Pilate.

I have wondered what my own attitude would have been—a Roman in Jerusalem, an Englishman in Malta ! Put Christ in the dress of a Maltese peasant and bring Him before the cultured eye. . . . What would one have said ? ‘ For they said, He hath a devil. . . . ’ One would not put it like that to-day, no doubt ; but speak learnedly of fanaticism, Freudian complexes, and all the hideous jargon of modern psychology—so much more revolting than the old belief in demoniac possession. But would one venture to believe, for the very word’s sake, in a man who, after all, was only a Maltese peasant—illiterate—the carpenter’s son—steeped in ignorant fanaticism—deluded, a subject for medical boards—calling Himself God: the commonest type of mania ? One may wonder ! . . . Or dare one even do that ? In all probability one would not even have had the scruples of Pilate, or felt the compunction—too late—of the Roman Centurion.

The Gospel lives in Malta.

CHAPTER XXVI

BACK TO THE STONE AGE

A MAN I shall call 'Goldbiggin' (to save his face) is at once the hero and the villain of this true story. He is the hero of it because the prime mover in a story must, I suppose, be reckoned its hero; and he is the villain because his conduct throughout was thoroughly evil.

It all really arose out of the Near Eastern crisis, for, if there had never been such a crisis, Goldbiggin would never have come out to Malta, and never got interested in the pre-historic sharks' teeth which are to be found embedded in the Malta cliffs. If he had never developed this interest, he might never have gone to the cliffs; and if he had never gone to the cliffs, it is certain he would not have asked me to go with him. So perhaps the real hero of this story is Kemal Pasha! But Goldbiggin remains the villain.

Goldbiggin was a young Army doctor (one of the hapless medicos of Imtarfa), a man of boundless energy, with pneumatic limbs all bounce and spring, and the strongest possible views on all subjects under the sun. It pains me to have to own that I liked him very much!

I did not, however, like walking with him. Goldbiggin always walked as though propelled from behind by a self-stoking engine over which he had no control at all; and it was his invariable

custom, while leaning comfortably back against this engine, to beguile the way with some Gospel according to Goldbiggin in a highly controversial field of thought. As, on this occasion, we rushed along the road which leads from Notabile to the Palace of Verdala (a road commanding one of the finest views in Malta ; a vista, framed between rugged crags, of the seven miles of country to Valletta and the sea)—as we rushed along this road, on our way to the sharks' tooth cliffs, the conversation most unfortunately turned on religion ! Here was matter to spoil any walk !

We pelted down the steep winding path into the Valley of Boschetto, becoming more and more quarrelsome, according to the invariable and time-honoured custom of men discussing religion. Goldbiggin accused me of obscurantism, I him of a cheap second-hand modernity. So absorbed were we in mutual recrimination that we had no eyes for the thick orange-groves of Boschetto beneath us, or for the pines on both sides of the way which make of this path almost the only woodland walk in Malta. We were talking so fast that we could spare no breath to inhale the rosemary withal, bushes of which were in dainty blue flower wherever one looked. We crossed the little bridge in the valley still arguing hotly, and scarcely so much as glanced at Malta's one avenue of tall deciduous trees. Nor did we pause to admire any of the tiny round stone ponds, brimming at this season with pellucid water, which make this path that rarest of things in the arid south—mossy and moist.

We were getting really 'snarky' by the time we had left Boschetto behind and were pushing up the intolerable path which rises amid desolation

towards the immense heights of the southward-facing cliffs. Goldbiggin declared there was no arguing with me, I that the root of the matter was not in him. We turned neither backwards to see the Palace of Verdala standing square among its pines, nor sideways to view the twin belfries of Dingli, that ultimate village, against a sky white-blue off the sea. Our eyes were closed to the wonderful colouring of the wild waste where we walked; its red and rich brown of earthy patches, its gaunt yellow ribs of rock, the passing purple of shadow from the travelling clouds. We saw nothing but red, and stumbled up the cumbered path only just keeping our hands off one another.

The crisis was reached just before we arrived at the top of the huge bleak cliff which fronts the African Sea. Here diplomatic relations abruptly broke off after a series of curt interjectional notes. I can only plead in my own defence that I was an invalid at the time, and very tired by now and consequently very cross.

"Of all the people I ever argued with," Goldbiggin said, "you are the most petulant and childish!"

"And your notion of a discussion," I retorted, "is one long string of entirely groundless assertions!"

"I shan't say another word," said Goldbiggin.

"Don't then!" I replied, weakly.

We emerged on to the cliff-top in a prickly silence.

But what a view!

The cliff, immensely, almost incredibly high, yet descends for many hundreds of feet gradually enough for the indomitable Maltese peasant to

have snatched it to his uses. The vast slope is so crossed and criss-crossed with the stone walls sustaining the precious earth, that the effect is of a colossal amphitheatre whence giants might watch the sport of sea-monsters. Then there is a point where the descent becomes sheer, and falls sharply on to ledges of unreachable rock fondled possessively by the jealous sea. No words can describe the appalling wildness and ruggedness of that cliff, with its savage needles of rock and frantic throttlings of root; yet even for these very rocks and roots the peasants have found a human use, twisting the latter into fences for their goats, and in caves and crevices of the former actually, with a rude supplement of loose stones, housing themselves and family.

For indeed, with all its savagery, the place is far from uninhabited. The aloof forms of Goldbiggin and myself had not shown up in silhouette upon the cliff-top for a moment, before we were surrounded by aboriginal children, who came scrambling up the steep paths with shrill competitive cries. They knew well what Goldbiggin was after, and wished to be chosen as guides. As for me, an ages-old shark's tooth embedded in a rock was not sharper than an ungrateful Goldbiggin, and I had no energy left for shinning about among roots and stones. Nothing more uninviting than the descent can well be imagined, and I told Goldbiggin he had better run off and play by himself. Which I had no sooner said than he did it, frolicking pneumatically down that man-trap of a path, with a horde of young aborigines screaming at his heels.

Quarter of an hour later he and his band were

mere scurrying worrying dots half-way down on the immense face of the cliff.

The morning had darkened. Dense Sirocco clouds were drifting in from the sea, and drops of rain began to fall on me as I sat on the cliff-top lamenting. In those days I was afraid of being long alone, owing to a habit of suddenly fainting I had acquired; and lo, here I was at the end of the world, more utterly alone than ever before in my life! There was little hope of Goldbiggin's returning in anything under two hours, nor did I particularly hanker after his company on the way home. He would probably be announcing that the presence of shark's teeth in Malta rock conclusively proyed Christianity to be a debased Alexandrian superstition of the Fourth Century! I did not know what to do.

My eye rested on the path, which led off between sheer walls of yellow rock. If I went down, I should have to come up again! But I had that desire to be near somebody, that little by little my faltering steps were enticed downwards. The path, which started off so gallantly, very soon fell among thieves, in the form of monstrous lumps of rock and dense convolutions of the toughest prickly-pear; and these so mashed and mangled it that very soon the little that was left was hardly worth even a Good Samaritan's attention. It was simply 'hackit into pieces sma', like the fause lover in the Scots ballad; and there was nothing for it but to descend independently.

I descended independently—in a series of goat-like bounds.

Far, far away the offended Goldbiggin rabbited about 'mid earth and stones, with his eager

assistants: an impossible mile sundered us—there was no reaching him. No other living thing was in sight: only a few goats crouched under the lee of walls away from the fine rain which was falling. The sea, dull and misty with Sirocco, lounged from immense shrouded distances towards the grisly base of the cliff, and moaned there wanly. Vast projections and elevations of rock beetled against the sky behind, and the infinite human pathos of those fields snatched from chaos surrounded one in every direction. I sat on a low stone-wall, in utter loneliness—the centre it seemed, of a vast soundless desolation, back in the very Stone Age itself, gazing woefully around upon that savage waste and desperate cultivation.

Goldbiggin seemed further off than ever, still poking with his stick and worrying the earth. His remoteness increased as I watched; soon the whole pack would round a bend and be lost to sight. No shout would reach their ears! My thoughts turned towards home. . . . But there was still the ascent!

The upward climb proved easier than I had thought. A woman emerged miraculously from the bowels of a great stone: womanlike—in spite the hardness of her dwelling—to encourage and console. 'O woman, in our hours of ease . . .' But it was far from that with me at the moment; and, 'pain and anguish racking my brow,' I found her as much a 'ministering angel' as any of her sisters in softer spots. Shouting and pointing, she put me on a path which had escaped the robbers; whereat, shouting and waving back to her, I followed it.

If the trolls had made that path, it could

hardly have been much different. If a man of the Stone Age had climbed it at my side, he would have seen nothing to strike him as unusual. Stables and houses scooped out of stone, barns of hollowed rock, baby-pens of loose rubble with semi-naked Stone Age infants crawling in them, hens lost in primeval forests of prickly-pear, goats crouched under carobs, mules contentedly crunching under impending avalanches! . . . It was among sights such as these that I came to my great conclusion, that Malta is no mere memorial of the Stone Age, but *is* that Age its very own self existing and functioning unto this day.

I stood upon the cliff-top.

Gazing down from that altitude, I could see no sign whatever of Goldbiggin. Perhaps he was lying in pieces on the nethermost ledge of sea-swept rock: perhaps he had fallen upon a prehistoric shark's tooth: perhaps he had been ambushed by a band of aborigines. It appeared, certainly, that he had no intention of returning to Notabile for lunch. . . . And indeed, at the time, my feelings still smarting at the way he had made me 'come so far and trot so quick', only to desert me at last, I could have hoped, like Sam Weller concerning the 'wictim of oppression in the suit of brimstone', that he might get what he deserved — 'in vich case it'll be precious little cold swarry as ever he'll be troubled vith again!'

I left him to it.

CHAPTER XXVII

A BIG TREE STORY

ONCE on a time, in Malta's early summer, some friends of ours returned from a visit to a Maltese landed proprietor, bringing strange tidings. They had walked, they told us, waist-high in grass and flowers beside a runlet of water, and cooled their brows in the shade of a giant tree!

To us, who knew the island at least as well as they, this sounded so like a Munchausen tale, that we merely smiled and reserved judgment, hoping that they would not become more excited still. We were given furiously to think, however, when, a moment later, they invited us to make picnic with them on the coming Sunday, to see for ourselves.

The situation of the alleged giant-tree was at the far end of the island, whither one could only be transported by bone-shaking motor-bus. In Malta, however, one would endure more than that for trees. Moreover, the liver being held by the ancients to be the seat of enjoyment, and jolting being beneficial to the liver, it might be that the shake-up on the road would enhance our pleasure in the tree.

It is a good long way from Porta Reale, Valletta, to St. Paul's Bay, where one alights for the tree; and, even after alighting, there remains an artful dodger of a path to be first identified and then

pursued. You choose the most uncompromising-looking opening in the arches of a low aqueduct which runs besides the road, walk nonchalantly through somebody's farmyard, and strike off up a steep hill to the right.

'When the fig-tree putteth forth her leaves, ye know that summer is nigh !' But indeed, as we pushed up the hillside that day, we did not need the glad green affirmation of the full-leaved and fruited figs to assure us of summer. Summer was blazoned aloft in the perfect blue of the sky, and written in golden cypher on the sea. Summer was proclaimed through a thousand trumpets of wild convolvulus, and plighted from the blue eyes of borage at our feet. Summer came bursting from the circumference of prickly-pears in gargoyle of young shoots ; it wafted a green smoke-screen of wild parsley over the path, and touched with alchemy the bristling beards of barley in the builded fields. Summer hurrah'd its advent from the full red mouths of poppies, and plucked a pæan from the lyre-like leaves of the vine.

Christened with sweat, we turned often for a cooling glance at the sea, the sun smiting us heartily on the back as we did so. The fierce heat dazzled on the gaunt yellow ribs of rock which stuck through the meagre soil of the hill-top, carobs darkled black against the baked walls of stones ; behind us the sea thrust a long arm into the land, with the laughter of waves ; beside us the vines hung their golden lamps of leaves, giving off invisible incense ; a cool undergrowth hid our feet, a trickle of water charmed the ear, and everywhere the eye was feasted on Malta's brief glory of summer flowers.

Passing a small farm, almost perfectly concealed among bushes, we were pleasantly *Saha'd* by a comely woman, peeped at timidly from among leaves by wild, shy children, and ignored point-blank by an assembly of black-and-white goats. A splendid ox brandished his large moist nose over a wall, and primitive farm-implements strewed the ground. The family washing was displayed in great detail on some tough stumps of prickly-pear. It was an aboriginal homestead of great charm, and we might have examined it further—but that, at this point, the ear is caught, the soul profoundly stirred, by a sound. . . .

What sound?

. . . The sound of summer breezes, whispering, among the leaves of a great tree!

The scene which met our eyes recalled the Third Act of 'Carmen', as it is commonly staged. A kind of sylvan platform confronted us, built up upon stone walls, and through the middle of this platform there reared and rose a truly gigantic ilex, twisting its trunk and thrusting its writhed arms to distances almost incredible when one realised that it was but a single tree. The effect, indeed, was of a whole wood, though the reality is but one tree and a few auxiliary bushes. Everywhere over that platform, and covering a wide circumference beyond, there brooded a chastened sylvan shade; nowhere—it seemed for a mile around—could the fierce sun get through the guard of feathery silver foliage, except here and there in sudden javelins of stabbing gold. For a certain distance on every hand Malta was a different world: no longer of yellow glares, scorched earth, and unchallenged prepotency of sun, but of mild woodland gloaming, cool green

half-lights, sylvan calm and romantic brooding.

They had not lied who brought us here.

Hardly had we settled down in the shade, like wanderers come home, when—all of a sudden—the wood was alive with all congruous creatures, such as one would expect there—fauns, satyrs, and bandits! Did we wake or dream? Was it fact or fancy that peopled the green twilight with a rout so exactly right? Alas, it was fact! .. Even as we gazed and wondered, the tallest of the fauns took a gun from the chief of the bandits—aimed, fired—and dashed forward with shouts of triumph to retrieve a very small bird, about the size of a poached egg, which fell from its perch on a bough of that mighty tree. This feat was acclaimed by the banditti with huzzas, by the fauns with prancings, by the satyrs with goat-like gambols: then, pouching their trophy and shouldering their guns, *exeunt* banditti and attendant sprites.

Poor little bird! . . . And birds so rare in Malta! I think, I *do* think, there was more life in that tiny body than meat upon it. Man must be served, and sport is sport; but, all the same, it seemed like sacrilege, there under the glorious benediction of the only great tree in Malta. However . . .

We turned to our picnic.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOULD OF FORM—THE AMAZONS OF DINGLI—IN THE ISLE OF HONEY

WHAT do the Maltese look like? Physical appearance is a delicate branch of the subject, but I need not fear to offend when I say, what is broadly true, that a composite study of the types most often met with in Malta would result in a quite good-looking fellow.

It is generally admitted that occupation has an effect on physiognomy. But I maintain that language also modifies it: a hypothesis which, if sound, should give all women a vital interest in the language question. The French, for example, are for ever making nasal sounds, and the result is a distinctively nasal cast of countenance. I do not mean a large nose. . . . Nothing so obvious. It has yet to be proved that a large nose is a help in speaking French. The appearance to which I refer is something far more subtle; consisting, in so far as one can locate it at all, in a kind of *pinch* of the nose. We all know that nasal sounds are easier to make (in fact, impossible not to make) when someone has hold of our nose. . . . Would it be so very surprising if the French had evolved a permanent slight pinch of the nose? But whether the language produced the pinch, or the pinch the language, I will not attempt to determine.

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However it may be with language, occupation or profession is known to affect countenance. Do we not all remark, often with dismay, how the putting on of a dog-collar quickly produces a cast of countenance as distinctive as a breed of dogs? Is there not something more than mere etiquette in the lawyer's reference to his 'learned brother'? Is there not a pronounced military face—the result, perhaps, of the word of command?

There are many, many types of Maltese; ranging from the typical Mediterranean appearance of the lower classes, to the distinctive Hittite head of some of the nobles. I know nothing of the Hittites, except what I have seen of them on vases and bits of frieze; but there is no mistaking the fact that the same long narrow head is to be found among the Maltese. Then there is the Maltese that might be an Arab—and the Maltese that might, but for pigmentation, be a Negro. The Arab type occurs in all ranks of society, but the Negro is confined to the lower.

Yet, while the Maltese, like the Jews, are of very many types, like the Jews again they all have something in common. Is it the eye? Is it the nose? Heaven knows! But it is there. Though you cannot place it, you can see it; something Maltese, unmistakable.

Maltese peasant-women run to flesh: this because ample contours are admired. The eastern blood of the Maltese declares itself in their admiration of the Houri; the Venus of their dreams is Rubensesque, grandiose, ox-eyed, not too intelligent—the Juno type. But, under the influence of English culture, a thin type of Maltese woman is evolving; and in her, in my opinion, is concentrated most of the intellect of the island.

Yet the Maltese, very sensibly, do not admire the defeminised athletic type of female ; they think her a kind of joke, and say so, in Maltese, as she passes, tennis-racket in hand, up and down Strada Reale.

Of the professional Maltese no composite can be attempted ; for they really do vary according to the 'cultural affinity' they affect. Signor Mufti could pass muster anywhere as an Italian . . . But how Lord Cherub would have fared in Tyre, I cannot say.

Two dominant types may be sketched : the former abounding among the clergy, the latter legal and political. There is a curious, heavy, fish-faced Maltese, ponderous and slow in manner, expressionless of eye ; and there is a small, nervous, dried-up type, fidgetty to the last degree, rapid of speech, exhausted with gesture. A ribald fate delights in juxtaposing the two, and the contrast is comical : the one sits with mouth open and bulging eyes, while the other leaps and claws like a monkey on hot iron.

The male peasantry is mostly short-legged, long-armed, and of immense chest-measurement. But the professional and noble Maltese is often slender and tall. There is a funny little trotting Maltese, and a serious stalking Maltese. Consequence is a feature of all professional types, for they take themselves very seriously ; especially the *studenti*, who are often of an awe-inspiring gravity. I remember particularly two—ring-leaders both in my first year's troubles—who used to promenade Strada Reale in portentous confabulation. One was immensely tall, with bulky, stooping shoulders, and a round, spectacled, sly face ; the other was short and slight, sallow-

skinned, black-eyed, and mischievous. They looked very funny together ; for the big one, with upraised forefinger, seemed always to be admonishing the other, lest the latter's impetuosity should lead to some inopportune letting fly of the Italian tricolour. "Leave it to me and Signor Mufti !" the big one seemed to be saying.

Owing, I think, to the stunting effects of precocious politics and early indulgence—which have much the effect of gin and cigars on the young—the Maltese boy is not nearly so good-looking as his sister. There is a precocity in the air of the boys ; their skin is more often deeply brown, and they are given to wearing little tight knickers long after the virile trouser would become them much better. But the girls are often radiantly pretty, with firm responsible faces, dainty ways, and considerate manners. You never hear *them* referred to as 'our poor students' ! . . . No girl would dare face her favourite 'Mother' at the Sacred Heart Convent with the reputation which that phrase implies. If she did, she would get such a talking-to from the 'Mother' as would last her the rest of her life.

Thus the girls go to their nuns, the boys to their politicians ; and the result of the different modes of treatment is written on their very faces.

The anxiety of the upper-class girls and women to improve themselves is both beautiful and pathetic. They have at least grasped the Biblical 'beginning of wisdom', which is the love of God ; and Socrates would have hopes of them, since they are all quite sure that they know nothing. I can only assure them that, in my experience, they know more than they think ; and, if they

will go on having courage, patience and perseverance, what they think their ignorance may yet prove the salvation of Malta. There are no finer women in the world than some of the Maltese ; and I would undertake to form a senate and legislative assembly, entirely of Maltese women, which would run the island quietly, prudently and successfully, and have plenty of time left over for the care of children and household affairs.

In treating of Maltese women and their looks, some mention must certainly be made of the wild damsels of Dingli. Dingli is a remote village in Malta, where, if anywhere, the true Maltese is to be seen without complications of 'culture'. Dingli, indeed, is so primitive and remote that one approaches it with some misgiving, certain of much staring, if not a few stones.

On my first visit to this village (walking), though from first to last I had a long trail of begging youngsters at my heels, nothing of any note occurred until I was leaving in the direction of Verdala. Then, however, in following a field-path, I ran almost at once into a number of goatherds, both male and female, converging with their flocks from the stony pastures. The males were young boys, clad in blue shirts and brown knickers (blue for the sky, brown for the earth), and not specially remarkable ; but the females—girls—young women—call them what you please ! . . . Nowhere off a Grecian urn have I seen such elf-locks, such wild grace of limb, such piquant faces.

Indeed, these damsels of Dingli were of an earlier epoch than the Greek. They were Pelasgian, primitive, daughters of very earth—the soul of the trees which Malta is without.

That group of them there, in that wild place with their herds all around them and a background of the banner-blue sky—that group of them, clad in loose garments of strange, faded tints, inimitable, with the stones of the way beneath their hardy, shapely, unshod feet, and on their heads that incredible elfish aureole of hair—makes a picture I shall never forget. A glance was all I had—all I dared have; for there was a formidable Amazonian poise of splendid heads, and a gleam of wild eyes and white teeth, enough—in a land of loose stones—to make one cautious. Even as it was, though they stood aside to let me pass, a skirl of Pelasgian followed after which sounded anything but complimentary. But you never can tell with that language—everything in rural Maltese sounds violent; and, for all I know, that group of grim young beauties may have been invoking the blessing of their ancient gods on my rapidly-retreating modernity.

There is beauty enough in Malta—beauty and wonder and wild grace of form. But you must get off the beaten track to find it, away from Valletta, away from the little narrow sophistication of Valletta and its suburbs. You must go to Gozo, where the Maltese race is at its purest, and where the vanished Pelasgians themselves might still feel at home.

The little tableau which follows here is a memory of our one visit to Gozo, and it is one of my most cherished impressions of beauty and of charm. Following the windings of a broad water-course, which actually had a little water in it, there, at a point, under the walls of a tiny village on its yellow sugar-loaf cliff, we came upon a cluster of youthful Gözitans engaged in the

congenial task of sheep-dipping. A brawny young woman of about eighteen, with skirt kilted up to the knees, had the wretched sheep firmly by the wool, and was endeavouring with deedy muscle to make it sit down in one of the stone basins where the water was deepest. A second girl, several years younger, radiantly pretty, and convulsed with laughter, acted as aid to the first, and poured water out of a pannikin over the victim, besides scrubbing it with her hands. On the bank above stood a group of interested watchers: a sturdy boy of about ten, critical and unbending, clad in the local camouflage; a wild little beauty of a girl, with dancing elf-locks and a gown of some unidentifiable faded colour; a smaller boy, seated, with a sad and saint-like face, olive-complexioned, reminding one of the St. Aloysius of pious sentiment, and watching the tussle in the stream with such a look as an early Christian child might have worn in the circus; and, finally, a precocious youth of (possibly) five, who, attired in a fetching blue coat (his only garment), strolled up from nowhere in particular and lent his countenance to the struggle.

On the stony declivities adjoining, a herd of mingled goats and sheep strayed vaguely about, occasionally getting where they had no business, and being shrilly miscalled and viciously stoned by the lovely little virago with the elf-locks; all of them wholly indifferent to the sufferings of their companion. Needless to say, the patient was heaving and writhing, and making abortive jumps and frustrated bolts, and utterly refusing to be dumped in the pool, and shuddering and gasping catarrhally, and snorting and bleating

dolorously, all after the manner of a sheep under treatment for its health's good.

Intensely intrigued, we at once joined ourselves to this group of the world's workers, and were privileged to witness the final heave and resounding flop with which that silly old fool of a sheep was at last thrust into its bath ; where, its feeble intellect appearing at length to grasp the object of its sufferings, it continued to lie, with a faint expression of face, while its exhausting toilet was completed. Not a muscle or a sinew of the baptists had relaxed when we joined the spectators, but they greeted us none the less with brilliant smiles and a few words of explanation in that amazing tongue. At a point in the proceedings, the 'pit' or group by the stream was reinforced by a 'gallery' or number of older women with high baskets on their splendidly-held heads, who halted upon a bridge to behold the feats of the rising generation. One old granny screamed advice, but her out-of-date wisdom appeared to be scouted by the wrestlers in the arena.

Later, while seated on a low wall watching the antics of thousands of green lizards, we ourselves became objects of interest. The inhabitants of that village were no less taken up with us than we with them ; and the little gathering of them which formed on the brow of the hill soon after our arrival was kept, with much coming and going of soundless bare feet, at full strength while we stayed there. There they stood, these Gozitans or Pelasgians, gravely and respectfully taking us in : bare-headed women with toddlers clinging to their skirts, a few men briefly back from the fields, and the invariable complement of bright-eyed children. Their gaze, as little personal as

that of wild things in the woods, embarrassed us not at all ; nor were they embarrassed when we returned it. I could only wonder how we seemed to them—we products of that sophistication they knew nothing of ; hectic and occasional beings, washed by a chance wave of life into this little creek of tranquil water, and so soon to be re-absorbed into the currents beyond. Nourished on food such as they have not to eat, dressed in clothes they have not to wear, our heads full of so many things which concern them not at all, what were we doing there ? Were they of our dream, or we of theirs ? No wonder they stared, and no wonder either that we stared again. . . . For we and they were regarding one another, through a glass, darkly, across the *saecula saeculorum* !

CHAPTER XXIX

A VISIT TO GOZO

I

PROBABLY no pleasure man can have in an ordinary way is greater than that of arriving on holiday at some new and beautiful place. The essence of holiday is change, and the delight of both is greatly increased when neither occurs too often. The poor man it is that enjoys his holidays most, because, not being able to afford very many, he has not exhausted the pleasure of change. One might almost add a Beatitude to the list and declare, Blessed are the poor in purse, for they shall enjoy their holidays !

We had long wished to visit Gozo from Malta ; and, after many conferences with a chronically ailing purse, we decided on the step at a certain Easter, and verily we had our reward. Purses, like hysterical subjects and hypochondriacs, should not be shown too much sympathy and consideration ; the more tenderly they are treated the worse they become, and I incline to the view that a little tonic brutality is best for them. To Gozo we went that Easter, scolding our purse and boxing its ears ; and we went, moreover, as I would recommend all others to go—not round by sea, though this is the cheap way—but by car to Marfa, the ultimate spit of Malta's rock.

Nobody with a taste for simple grandeur and

austere restraint of scenery should miss the sight of Marfa, Marfa being the most ascetic and rigid of spots. It limits itself from the spectacular point of view to one policeman—and even he is more often in his shirt-sleeves than in uniform! . . . And, for the rest, Marfa is rock, sheer rock ; with one house, built of the rock on which it stands, for the policeman to 'disperse' into. Marfa is rock—and sea—and a view : a view of Gozo rising in pastel-tints beyond the straits, and of Comino, the least of the Maltese islands, dividing the swollen waters. There is a strange charm about the bare bones of this ultimate spot.

Between Marfa, Malta, however, and Migiarro, Gozo (Dover and Calais respectively), there lies a strait—a certain quantity of restless water, a heaving congestion of the ocean ; there lies, in fact, what Matthew Arnold has well called the 'unplumbed, salt, estranging sea'. And indeed many travellers to Gozo have felt quite irreconcilably 'estranged' from this element after experiencing the sample which separates Marfa from Migiarro ! This strait, however, occasions the supreme thrill of the whole journey ; for to pass a strait you must have a boat, and to pass *this* strait the boat you have is a Gozo boat—about as superbly graceful and swanlike a vessel as you are ever likely to see.

You have come to Marfa by car, and there the car stands, just where the half-hearted road utterly peters out. There stands the car, a mute symbol of modern civilisation, with the disconsolate driver gazing bleakly at the policeman who solemnly regulates the traffic by holding up his hand. There stands the car : and there, moored along the shelving rocks, heaving on the

'estranging' sea, manned by half-a-dozen pirates, all grinning from ear to ear, is the Gozo Boat—a sort of ancient Phœnician coasting-craft, sturdy yet lovely of build, gaily picked out with colour, reassuringly sea-worthy, and just as uncompromisingly *ancient* as the car is uncompromisingly modern.

But the policeman is becoming tired of the congestion on the shore; it is time we 'moved on' by getting aboard. The pirates with nods and becks and wreathéd smiles invite us to walk the plank; the boat (through the agency of the 'estranging' sea) rises to meet us, and we get aboard a little before we expected and with less dignity than we desired. The pirates range up in rows, push off, and get to work with long oars: seated on the raised stern upon a pile of sails, we look back towards Marfa across a widening stretch of a water so blue and so translucent that it holds one breathless with admiration. Meanwhile, if there should be any stir of the air from the north or south, the sea is passing in moving hills under the boat, and there is apt to fall a pensive silence.

Once beyond Comino, the sea begins to take us more seriously altogether; and, watching the enormous muscles of the deep tightening and relaxing under us, I marvelled at the hardihood of those ancient Phoenicians who, in craft identical with this one, set out upon the furthest hazards. I liked to think of them sticking to their oars, lean, sinewy, brown-faced men—the Biscayan seas running high above their heads; and those same heads full of but one consuming motive—tin!

Gozo puts a stop to these reflections. The sea

dwindles as we run under the grand cliffs, and next minute, rounding a little breakwater, we haul to in Migiarro, the port of Gozo. We are an event, and, as we land in the charming little cove, our movements are the focus of as many eyes as there are Gozitans in attendance. We have no time to feel shy, however, for the ubiquitous carozzi is immediately in competitive and mutually-abusive evidence, the pirates—harmless as the straits—have handed out our luggage, and in a moment we are whipped up and away for crested Rabato, Gozo's central capital, leaving Migiarro, with its clustering white houses, its bush-fringed beach of pebbles, its tiny harbour full of gaily-painted Gozo boats, and its sunny green of sprouting figs, behind us.

II

THE April sun shone brightly and warmly upon us as we drove along, and there was a huge unfurling of sky, blue and travelling white. By dint of much neck-craning round the blinkers which carozzi-drivers seem to think as necessary for the fare as the horse, we discerned in the distance, standing high, a town of such imposing appearance as to warrant it the capital. It was in fact no less; and a very fine town is Rabato, with its walled and embattled citadel perched on an impregnable sugar-loaf rock, where of old the Gozitans gathered from far and near when the Turk or Corsair or Barbary Pirate favoured the island with a flying call. Very snug they must have been up there, these Gozitans; with their cathedral-church and tiny piazza all complete, and their maze of tiny

winding streets, all within the girdle of the strong protecting walls. It was pleasant to think of them, looking down over the battlements (as we did after tea) and perhaps throwing the peel of their oranges and husks of nuts down on to the helmeted head of the Turk gibbering as he brandished scimitar in vain. If the Turk had any sense, he probably visited the Blue Grottoes of Xlendi and the other beauty-spots of the island, dabbling his toes (as we did) in crystalline waters, and let the Gozitans be ; for in truth there can have been but little massacring to occupy him when once the islanders had gained the stronghold on the hill.

Arrived at our hotel, we had the usual difficulty in persuading the carozzi-man that, while the spirit indeed was willing, the flesh was weak, and we did not propose to set off immediately on a tour of the island. We said we wanted to see our room first and have some tea, but, if he cared to call round again to-morrow *plus* the equipage, there might then be something doing. Sustained by this prospect, the ardent and amiable creature took himself off, with a flash of splendid white teeth and a chirrup to his horse (Maltese carozzi-men make brothers of their steeds) ; and we were left to sample the amenities of Gozo's hotel.

'Persicos odi, puer, apparatus !' . . . For me such hospitality as that hotel afforded, together with the fresher air and wider spaces of Gozo, was amply enough. Indeed, had we eaten all that there was to eat at every meal, we must have borrowed Gargantua's mouth first. Rough our entertainment may have been, for the amenities of life are hard to come by in Gozo—but it was

ready to a degree ; everything was clean ; the wine of Gozo is good, the cheese even better, and there was a young waiter at the hotel whose smile, without any exaggeration, was one of the happiest and most beautiful things I have ever seen.

Valletta, in its way, I do believe is as noisy as London, and after Valletta the silence of Gozo was adorable. Except for the cracked church-bells, the only sounds ever heard in Gozo are those agricultural ones which seem, not to break, but to deepen the peace. As we drank the tea which we badly needed after the long dusty drive from Migiarro, we drank even more deeply of the sun-warmed stillness which wafted in at the open window.

The citadel of Rabato is visible from almost all over the island ; and, man being so made (at least regarding physical geography) that he cannot behold a high place without wishing to stand there, it became our duty and pleasure after tea to climb upwards at once. Pirates, corsairs, Turks, civil strifes, all the rough-and-tumble *du temps jadis*, may have been unsettling enough to live in, but at least these conditions had the good effect of forcing man to build his habitations high up, at vantage points upon the throning hills, and so of rendering queenly and gracious those towns and cities which nowadays are all too often mere complications of sordid masonry, ignoble and insignificant—mere spoilings of fair valleys and foulings of clear streams.

Going up through the main piazza, and turning right towards the citadel, we wished first of all to see the inside of the cathedral, but found that this is sooner wished than done. The citadel of

Rabato is designed, doubtless with a view to Turk-puzzling, on the principle of a maze, and of this maze the west-door of the cathedral forms the centre or heart. While we readily got above it, so as to look down on the roof, and as readily below it, so as to look up towards its towers, we could by no means arrive on the level, so as to enter it; wherefore, full of a mild resignation, we abandoned the pious project, and climbed instead on to the topmost battlement, whence two-thirds of the whole island was to be viewed, with glimpses of the sea, in a sunset splendour of green, crimson, purple and gold.

To us, sitting on the stone walls and exulting in the vastness and strong colour of the view, there came now a police-officer, whose object in sleuthing us to that point was not to arrest and charge, but to offer himself as guide around the citadel. In the wake of this obliging and intelligent officer we made now a tour of the ramparts, and had from him an explanation of the roofless houses and disused causeways into which we looked. The Turk or other marauder comes no more, and hence the stronghold has fallen into decay. Now the houses are but heaps of loose stones, with grass and nettles growing thick upon the hearths where generations gathered in the evenings of former days. What a triumph of packing that tiny town within the walls must once have been! And, doubtless, how insanitary! Yet, in the evening light which lay golden on the hill-tops and sober in the broad valleys upon the fields of crimson clover, few sights that I had seen impressed me more emotionally than the stones of that tiny town, now dispersed in ruins, but showing still the

windings of its long-untrodden streets, the doorways of its derelict houses.

You cannot go anywhere in the Maltese islands but your reputation precedes you, and it soon became embarrassingly evident that the police-officer knew me for a 'professor!' He insisted on showing me inscriptions in divers unfamiliar tongues, and waiting patiently for me to decipher them: a thing which, between native ignorance and acquired short-sight, I was quite unable to do. How I should have saved my face I do not know, had not my wife, with wonderful cleverness, picked out the cardinal words and passed them on to me in an undertone, so that I was able to say—"Ah yes, I see the drift, um, ah"—and make the excuse of the deepening twilight to cover my retreat. Those inscriptions made me want my dinner and a bottle of Gozo wine; so, as the daylight was now all but gone, we descended to the piazza, wished our obliging guide good-night, and plunged downhill in the direction of the hotel.

III

THE sun was shining in brilliantly through the bedroom window when we awoke next morning, and when we went downstairs the carozzi-man of the day before was shining in no less brilliantly through the dining-room window. He greeted us with an engaging smile, and began at once about a 'very nice' cave which he had decided to drive us to that morning. His English was limited, his enthusiasm boundless; the cave, he repeated, pointing with his whip in what was presumably its direction, was 'very nice,' and his

charges for conveying us there a mere nothing. We pointed out that the cave would be just as nice after breakfast, or even after lunch, but about this he appeared doubtful, flirting with his whip, and babbling on, albeit more faintly, about his cave. I believe we should have given in, and gone off to the cave incontinently, had not the waiter entered just then with the breakfast omelette; but, at this apparition, the carozzi-man, after ogling us for a few minutes with liquid reproachful eyes, gradually thawed away from the window, leaving us with a remorseful sense of having dealt a cruel blow to a heart which 'never loved a dear gazelle, but it was sure to pine and die'.

I may say here that, wherever we went in Gozo, the people were all equally pleasant and wistfully persuasive, like nice children. They affected me, like Schumann's Songs of Childhood, to a state of doting acquiescence in whatever they wanted of me; and, as Gozo is the unassailable stronghold of Signor Mufti in politics, I began to think there must be something winning about a personality which could enslave such fascinating constituents.

However, not all the pathos of the whole cab-driving confraternity could be allowed to interfere with my invariable first morning's programme of doing just nothing in particular. That is the way to savour the distinctive atmosphere and get at the inner personality of a new place. With me it is always '*to-morrow to fresh fields*' To-day I always want to stay where I am. What I particularly dislike is those 'objects of special interest'—such as museums, picture-galleries, and other such enclosures of stale air—which are,

after all, to a place but as a stamp-album or collection of picture-postcards is to a person: something extraneous and adventitious, having little or nothing to do with essential personality.

Going out into the piazza that morning, we adopted a modified form of the method used by St. Francis of Assisi when in doubt as to which way to take. We did not actually whirl round and round until we were dizzy and then stumble off according to some bias of the brain, but we simply pursued the first way that opened, which is the true method of errantry and high adventure. In our case, on that morning, it answered admirably and led us to a vision of essential Gozo.

A rough road or track, falling away steeply from almost under our feet, invited us into a vast amplitude of corn-green and clover-crimson country, flanked on the near left and distant right with high broad-topped hills which swept gradually down to where, in the very centre of the valley, nestling like an infant on some ample maternal lap, lay a tiny flat-roofed village, whereof the single street, clambering up on the low yellow cliffs of a natural water-way, afforded just the necessary point of rest for the eye amid the surrounding immensity. Over us loomed the crested rock of Rabato; on either hand surged the huge land-swell of the gradual hills; before us the valley dandled its nursing village, enticing us downwards with a white streak of path; while everywhere around—mingling with the various harvests, fringing the top of every wall, thrusting through chinks and crevices of stones—in vivid splashes of unconscionable chrome, the yellow oxalis blazed back the glory of the splendidly-presiding sun.

But with Gozo, as with Malta, it is in the little bits and fugitive glimpses that the greatest beauty lies. Here, perhaps, a tiny pathway of flowers leads upward to the fields, and here the full blue of the sky flies out like a great flag above the rich yellow of some stone wall. Here, again, some seraphic child, clad like the lilies of the fields, pauses in its severely practical occupation to stare for a fleeting moment of wild loveliness before vanishing soundlessly like a spirit. What a secret of raiment these rural Gozitans have discovered ! What with yellow trousers against yellow rock, blue shirts lost in the blue of the sky, what with bleached gowns blending with backgrounds and assorted fadings assimilating with fields, we have many a time stared for five minutes at a prospect before becoming aware that some man, woman or child, or perhaps a little group of all three, was included in it. If good taste in dress is to be in perfect harmony with the surroundings, then the rural Gozitan has as good taste as anybody I know.

Arriving at the village, we inspected the water-course, which, contrary to all precedent in these arid islands, did genuinely contain a little water. A mere trickle, but *water*—with here and there a natural scoop of stone forming a basin, where a thirsty goat might drink or a child get wet. Indeed, even as we looked, a toil-stained husbandman paused there to bathe his feet on his way homewards to the village. It was here, later on, that we beheld the sheep-dipping operations which are described in another chapter.

We set off along this water-course, and were well rewarded. At every bend it displayed fresh loveliness. Now it narrowed in until it became

almost a tunnel of smooth yellow stone ; now it opened out into miniature amphitheatres, crowned with tall green corn and cascaded with flowers. Here, suddenly, it showed a damp grotto, dripping from its ledges and intensely, moistly green ; and here again it led up by natural steps to some altitude grown thick with prickly-pear, whence, between gaps in the big undulating hills, one beheld far vistas of the smiling countryside, backed in the distance by the crested rock of Rabato, grimly walled and skirted with shadow.

And the flowers ! . . . Great banks of mignonette, lakes of daisies, rivers of the ubiquitous lemon-yellow oxalis—which last is so bright that, when its blossoms close, the sun seems to have gone behind a cloud. And whatever space was left was filled with ‘ardent marigolds’, red, yellow and purple vetch, scarlet and blue pimpernel, great glowing poppies, and all kinds of strong, sweet herbs. And then the fig-trees in early leaf ! . . . These alone were worth the journey to behold : the slender, silver-grey branches holding up little translucent green leaves which catch and keep the sun like lamps and light up all the thickets. What a valley ! We might have followed its elfin wanderings until we came upon the sea.

Donkeys ! Never have I seen such a variety of these charming animals as is to be seen in the Maltese islands. There are donkeys with short legs and donkeys with long legs, long-haired donkeys and short-haired donkeys, donkeys with tufts and donkeys without tufts, fair donkeys and dark donkeys, donkeys of all sizes—from that of a small horse to that of a large mouse ! Possibly the most fascinating of all was a Gozo

donkey which we came across on our way to that village in the Valley of Flowers. This was of the small, dark, short-legged, long-haired, tufted kind, and it was devoting itself strictly to business (in the form of a heap of dried clover) outside a tumble-down shed where, presumably, it lived. In spite of our admiration (it was pretty to distraction), and the same finding vent in pats and other endearments, we failed—having no sugar in our pockets—to interest that donkey, who continued to take no sort of notice of us beyond an occasional preoccupied twitching of the ears. 'Business is business' was that donkey's motto, and he lived up to it: 'nothing for nothing.' Six times in all did we pass that donkey, six times did we pause with rapturous exclamations, and six times, but for a twitch or two of the ears, did he ignore us with a scathing emphasis worthy of the late Queen Victoria!

Oh, Gozo is a gem of a little island! . . . Utterly, utterly outside the orbit of the ordinary world.

IV

IN the event our carozzi-driver had nothing to complain about; his charming personality, well-groomed horse and scrupulously laundered conveyance went with us to many places. A Maltese or Gozitan carozzi-man is a great asset on an excursion; he enters so thoroughly into the spirit of the thing—and he is never put out if you keep him waiting, but just finds a bush and falls asleep there with his hands clasped behind his head, while the horse, with carozzi attached, grazes quietly at the roadside.

Even if I had not been strictly charged to visit Xlendi (pronounced Shlendee), I should have done so, because I am partial to places beginning with X. I am longing, since I lived in Malta, to be called on to play the fireside game of Loving one's Love with the different letters of the alphabet, for, supposing this intractable consonant to fall to my share (as it generally does), I am henceforth well prepared. Imagine the sensation I shall create when I airily announce — 'I love my love with an X, because she is Xanthomelanous, I hate her because she's a Xanthippe, her name is Xicluna, and she comes from Xlendi'! 'Xanthomelanous', incidentally, really is a good dictionary word.

Xlendi is the name of a cove or inlet of the Gozo seas, where the waters are transparent to a degree exceptional even for the Mediterranean, and where, if you stir them with a stick or with your hand, they turn the purest opaque azure. I had never seen, or even imagined, such an effect of colour, obtained at the cost of no more trouble than dabbling hot toes in cool waters. For the rest, Xlendi is as pretty a little cove as you are ever likely to see, and the soft volcanic grey of its rock is a rest to the eye after the prevailing yellow glare of these islands. The approach is along a steep descending valley, and you emerge upon a tiny beach of silver pebbles where the sea whispers for ever between protecting rocks. There are Gozo boats hauled up upon the shingle, and, even as we arrived, one of these put out to sea and glided away over the pale waters with a soft splash of oars. It was one of those restful afternoons, when the sun shines indeed, but leniently, through a fine lattice of white clouds.

If there had been a sea-coast to Eden, I think it might have been not unlike Xlendi ; a little natural harbourage of warm air and crystal water, with a jewelling fringe of ripples and faint echoes among darkling caves, a place where the great winds could not drive the waves of the sea, or swimmers be sucked outwards by treacherous currents tugging from beneath.

Then, on another afternoon, from a lighthouse gallery, we beheld a huge floor of sea stretching away towards Sicily, with that deceptively flat appearance which the ocean has from a height, and we beheld Gozo sprawling and undulating in every direction, with the carozzi, a pathetically small and lost object, on the stony track five hundred feet beneath, and we beheld, far away to the east, beyond the invisible straits, on the uplands of Malta, the outpost town of Melleha, its yellow walls and towers lit up by the afternoon sun. Gozo, from that vantage-point, might have been a huge man-of-war, and the lighthouse its topmost gun-turret, so that one began to feel excessively nautical and to stride around the gallery with the air of a Nelson or a Jellicoe, as if conscious of being 'full-charged with England's thunder' and 'ploughing the distant main'.

These are just a few of our Gozo adventures.

v

BUT the most exciting of all our Gozo adventures was undoubtedly the return to Malta, which we had intended to do on Maundy Thursday by the little steamer which leaves Migiarro every day at the inconvenient hour of 9 a.m. This, however,

like all my sea-involving fixtures, was contingent on the state of the weather. Late on the Wednesday night, the air being then perfectly tranquil and the experts confident of its remaining so, the project still held good; but we awoke at five next morning to the racketing of a sort of young hurricane or hobbledehoy gregale, and, looking out from the front windows, beheld a scud of blue-black cloud travelling low over the hills, and caught glimpses of a brindled sea showing its teeth and flourishing its tail like a wolf. Much discouraged, we sought counsel of the proprietor, who assured us that by postponing our departure for one day we could go over to Marfa next morning with the mail, and be taken up there by the motor from Valletta, which meets the same. As we were in no hurry to leave Gozo, and most disinclined for a choppy voyage on such a morning, we closed with this suggestion: whereupon the wind instantly dropped, the sun came out and the day settled in to be glorious.

The mails were timed to leave Migiarro every morning promptly at 8.15, and consequently we, with English ideas of the word 'promptly', breakfasted at about 6.30. It was a beautiful morning, still and warm, with a sky of soft blue and pearl, with white slanting wands of sunlight charming the drowsy hills. When precisely carozzi-men get up I do not know, and dare not guess, but ours was the first thing we saw when we looked out of the window before dressing. Having received the last admonitions of the proprietor concerning the wicked wiles of dghaisa-men, we said good-bye to him and the waiter, and set off after a hurried breakfast for Migiarro.

Now, whether because we were travelling on Good Friday, which is a profane thing to do, or for some other more obscure reason, no sooner had we set off on that journey than our adventures began. First, the horse, whenever he spied on the road before him a man, woman, child, goat, bush or gate-post, stopped dead and declined to proceed until the driver got down and led him. Several elderly men whom we met sunning themselves by the roadside had to be persuaded to subdue themselves behind walls before the horse could be got to tolerate them. This sort of thing went on happening with a decidedly retarding effect, and the driver, laughing good-humouredly, informed us that the horse was 'fresh'. We had to accept this explanation, and laugh like the driver whenever the horse pretended it had never set eyes on an ordinary goat before. We were a little anxious about our mail-boat, that was all. Freshness, a quality very desirable in eggs, in horses has, very definitely, its drawbacks.

By the time we arrived on the brow of the hill overlooking Migiarro, the 'freshness' of the horse had worn off: which, indeed, was just as well, the road being thick with goats, hens, and children. If Migiarro had looked lovely in the late afternoon of our arrival, it looked even lovelier now—in the soft white light of early morning, the smooth straits gleaming like opals, and the sun stretching dazzling swords across the lulled expanses of sea. The quay was even busier than on our arrival, and, the horse suddenly so deciding, we dashed into the thick of things as though we were bringing the good news from Ghent to Aix.

Instantly we were surrounded by pirates, all jabbering Gozitan-Maltese fifty to the dozen, all with deprecating shrugs and coy shakes of the head, disclaiming the most elementary acquaintance with English, all grabbing at different bits of our luggage, and each one pointing with ecstatic finger to the superior charms of his own particular dghaisa. It was useless to say 'mail' — they all pretended they had never heard the word: 'letters' had no better luck, 'post' was as bad; and, though we said all three, not once, but many times, in tones ranging from plaintive supplication to truculent threat, none the less, by some magnetic force or fascination of the Gozitan eye, we and our luggage were kidnapped into a dghaisa and spirited away upon the broad seas, just at the very moment when the carozzi with the mails was seen to come dashing down the hill!

It was bootless to protest, though we did so; the pirates merely wagged their tails, so to speak, and busied themselves about the sail. Summoning our philosophy and resigning ourselves to the inevitable, we took stock of our captors and perceived them to be the very same crew which had brought us across before! 'Why do the Gentiles rage, and the people devise vain things? . . . We determined to invoke the aid of the policeman at Marfa and cause the thunders of the Law (in Maltese) to crash around those pirates' ears!

As a matter of fact, our hearts had melted long before the Jove-like figure of the policeman hove in sight: one cannot be long angry with a Maltese aboriginal, he is so big-eyed and simple, and like a child. Moreover, the morning was so beautiful,

the sail so glorious above us, the waves so opalescent. Nevertheless, on arrival at Marfa, pending the policeman's arrival, we folded our arms and gazed darkly upon those wicked pirates —who stood, pictures of wide-eyed innocence, our luggage in their hands, upon the yellow slabs of Marfa.

The policeman seemed pained and put out at our reappearance, but he lent a judicial ear to my complaints, which were less bitter than I had originally intended. Anon he parleyed with the pirates, and everything was amicably arranged: the pirates took to their element again, what time the policeman, a small boy, and ourselves wheeled off in stately procession to the house.

At the house the policeman motioned us to chairs, which we took with thanks. He then broke it to us as gently as he could, kind man, that if we were waiting for a car to take us to Valletta, we should be wanting those chairs a long time, since no car was expected that day. He seemed sorry for us, but disposed to think that probably we deserved what we were getting. We bethought ourselves of Melleha, and asked if a carozzi were obtainable from there? He, much cheered at the prospect of being rid of us, went off to inquire over his official telephone; leaving us to meditate blankly on the discomforts of carozzis and the miles between us and home.

It was now several hours since we had had anything to eat, and we began to wonder whether the policeman would take a sympathetic view of this human frailty. On his return shortly to inform us that a carozzi was even then speeding blithely towards us from Melleha, we seized the advantage of his more propitious aspect to confide

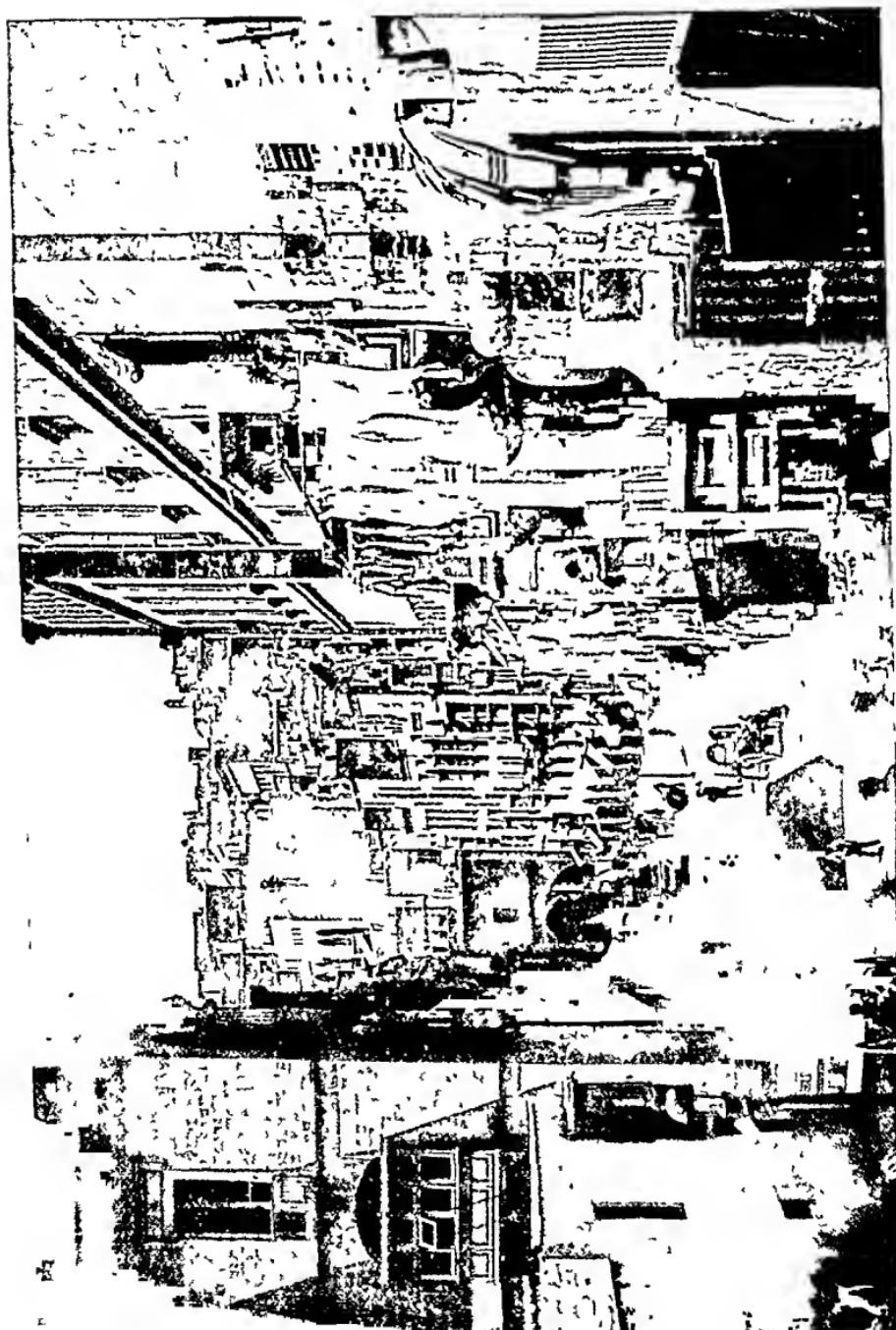
in him our plight. It seemed to touch him, for, nodding his head and beckoning darkly, he repeated our suggestion ' tea ' several times in a sepulchral voice, and led us into the house. Here he produced a liqueur-bottle and two tiny glasses, which he filled ; then, with a lenient if slightly saddened expression, he again intoned the word ' tea ' and offered us the glasses. Good man, he waved away our proffer of coin, so we drank his health ; then, with the thanks his kindness deserved, we strolled outside into the sun to await our conveyance and watch the arrival of the bona-fide mail-boat, which, with swan-like wings outspread, was at that moment approaching.

When we saw the crowd on board that mail-boat, we entirely forgave the pirates their abduction of us. A large Gozitan family appeared to be emigrating *en masse*. There was a father, a mother, an uncle or so, an aunt or two, some grown-up sons and daughters, children of all ages, several infants in arms, a large canvas-bag of effects, a sewing-machine, a crate, a coop, a dog and—a goat ! Disembarked, this multitude spread itself over the landscape, each member quietly resuming his, her or its, characteristic occupation. Father and uncles went off for a drink, mother and aunts began to talk and sew, the children began to play, the infants to crow or cry, the dog to bark and caper, the goat to browse, while the grown-up sons and daughters formed a group round a priest who, for no reason that we could see, had cropped up out of nowhere and strayed down to the water's edge under a large green umbrella. No arrangements of any sort seemed to have been made for conveying the party hence ; and, as they were still all there when we set off

in our carozzi, for anything I know they may be there still. Perhaps they were a picnic—but then why the sewing-machine? Perhaps they were the policeman's Gozitan relatives come over to spend Good Friday with him—but then why the goat? And in any case the policeman took no manner of notice of them. If it was a mere excursion, why the coop and why the crate? If a veritable emigration, how could a single canvas-bag carry all their effects? No, it is a great mystery—like the Sphinx! At any rate, they all assorted charmingly with the landscape, and, two minutes after landing there, appeared to have grown nowhere else since the Year One. Such are the mysteries of life. . . . Who shall solve them?

As for us, we pressed the policeman by the hand, and rumbled away towards Melleha; reaching home sore in every joint from four to five hours later.

We had visited Gozo.



CHAPTER XXX

EXILE

WHEN the poet Ovid, having touched all-powerful Augustus on a tender spot, was exiled for that indiscretion to Tomi, we know that he took it, poor wretch, very hard. The mind of Caesar seems to have gone to work to find just that spot of all the Imperial dominion where a poet would be least at home. Is Tomi on the Bug or on the Don ? Perhaps it hardly matters ; for the one, doubtless, is not less buggy than the other. Wherever the place was, Ovid loathed it from his soul.

In the long sunless winters at Tomi, the river (whichever it is) froze over all hard black ice ; and the Tartars, a beastly people, used often to come brawling across it, keeping the Roman garrison ever on the alert, and the hapless poet so uneasy that it is great wonder he ever found heart for his innumerable hexameters and pentameters. And all the while his heart yearned sickly for Rome—Rome, the Capital of the World : Rome, the only city !

Often, in his mind's eye, no doubt, he saw the Forum where his friends walked and talked ; its temples and palaces would rise before him, fondly dreaming, and the Palatine where the offended Purple kept its state. In sleep, perhaps, he feels the genial Roman sun on the steps of the Capitol, and is tantalised by the unreal

turbulence of Tiber. Oh, that he had been but more discreet! . . . Then never, never had he parted from beloved Rome!

Poor Ovid!

Other poets have suffered exile, for poetry is a queer business at best; but, from the exceeding number of these unhappy ones, I need mention only Coleridge, secretary to some Governor (heaven help that governor!) in—Malta!

Why did Coleridge ever go to Malta? His motive for this action, like so much of his later talk, is far from clear. We know he did not like the island, but we must have known the island itself to realise how much. Coleridge of the 'Lyrical Ballads', Coleridge of the moist Mendip lanes, Coleridge of the 'Ode to Melancholy',—in Malta! We are told by his biographers that he returned to England no better in health and spirits. Small wonder! The Sirocco had blown across a lifeless sea upon him, and the parched earth of Malta's long summer had jaded his eye. How he must have groaned when, from his window in the Palace, he saw the fierce sun smiting the square a leprous white, when the evergreen (that is, never-green) trees in the courtyard appeared black in the same remorseless glare!

Poor Coleridge!

Exile is a cruel thing, whether imposed by the Roman Purple or by some other no less imperative fate. Stevenson tells us that, wherever he went in the wide South Seas, there were always Englishmen there, all ceaselessly grumbling, all desperately home-sick. How the Eastern Telegraph recruits its far-spread cable-ends, heaven alone knows! . . . But these men at least, as the Services no less, inasmuch as they carry with them a social medium

in which they can thrive, suffer but physical, not moral exile.

Malta, for the odd man out, is moral exile.

When the Jews were led captive to Babylon, they hung up their harps beside the waters, and could not sing. The songs of Zion hurt too much. Babylon, with its hanging gardens, a wonder of the world, was a fine city enough, no doubt—finer, perhaps, than Jerusalem: but it was not Zion. 'They remembered Zion!' And Zion is less a place, with locality and a name, than an atmosphere and spirit. Where a man's soul is at home, there his Zion is. Did not even Christ, after his resurrection, go before the disciples into Galilee? . . . Not in Jerusalem, but in Galilee, would he reveal Himself to these Galileans, for in Galilee only—despised province though it were—would these fishermen and others be truly at home.

Good catholics tell us that a catholic need never suffer moral exile. That, they say, is a glory of the faith, for, wherever the Mass is celebrated, there is Zion and home. Yet they warn travellers earnestly not to be put off and disedified by the strange manners and customs of catholics abroad. They may be right, but Christ Himself did not argue in this way: he was too human. He judged that not even his own well-beloved countenance were Zion to those distracted followers, except it shone upon them in familiar Galilee, where their homes were, beside the waters that they knew. What they saw in Galilee, that they would believe. A people makes its own God, albeit not with hands; and it is association more than anything else that makes most of us believers. 'Except ye become as little children

... ' And is there a surer way to this saving transformation than to go home ?

Once, when we were living in Strada Mezzodi, a small boy leaned out of a window opposite, and, in a clear child's treble, poured out the familiar English psalm tunes ; so that I, who listened, was straightway removed from Malta and all its yellow strangeness, to find myself in an Oxford garden, with smooth lawns and fair trees around me, and the chapel organ pealing a golden hymn into the sweet air of evening. Sentiment ? Yes, if you like : but sentiment is a mighty power, and to be reckoned with. It makes and unmakes Zion. While we are striving and straining and arguing, we can be anything or nothing religiously ; but let there come a lull, as there came a lull to me in Malta, let us only be tired and discouraged enough, and we shall indeed become as little children, wanting to go home.

The Maltese should sympathise here, if nowhere else throughout this book., for Malta, the island, is a religion to them, in the strict sense of the word. It is not merely their country, it is their world, and their tie with God. Crossing the Straits once from Syracuse to Malta, I was both amused and touched to witness the wild excitement, the ecstasy almost, of a group of Maltese clergy, old and young, returning from Rome, at seeing their own beloved island dawn yellow above the sea. Instantly they broke out into exultant, almost falsetto, Maltese, which waxed in volume as the island waxed in size ; and they trod the deck with buoyant, triumphant step, for they were approaching Zion. They were coming back into the air they could breathe, to

the sights and sounds which joined them to God in love.

It is perhaps as some measure of compensation for their remoteness and lack of account in the world's eye that such places as Malta and Iceland should be so intensely loved by their inhabitants. Malta, as I have said, is known to the Maltese as 'Fior del Mondo', and there is an Icelandic song to effect that the sun looks with particular pleasure upon that inhospitable-sounding island. There is more than mere parochialism in this ; the Maltese is a *lover* of Malta, as the Icelander of Iceland, and he *knows* with the happy assurance of the lover that nowhere else on earth is there a spot so bounteously blessed by providence. Hence 'Fior del Mondo', and the Icelandic song about the sun.

Local feeling is much stronger in some places than in others. The Londoner is fond of London, but it is not to him what Paris is to the true Parisian. It does not even deserve to be, for London is not the perfect expression of a mentality and way of life that Paris is. London on the whole misrepresents the English ; it has come about largely in spite of them. . . . But Paris has come about because of the French.

And Strada Reale has come about because of the Maltese. They really love that street from their hearts. Pacing up and down that street in twos and threes, always slowly, for ever getting in the way and being got in the way of, interrupting gesticulatory philippics to exchange a kindly 'saha' with a group of friends, hearing the fearful racket of the belfries, smelling the warm ambered air which breathes from churches, men, women, boys, girls, babies, priests and goats—they are

happy there, because it is home, because it is more than home, it is Zion.

And in summer, too, on the hot rocks of Sliema, on the brink of that calm sea which cuts them off from all the world, bathing, snoozing, smoking, chatting, with three generations of the family around them, their friends besides them, carozzis jingling on the road behind, a band playing, and, over all, the flat discordant clash of innumerable festal bells—the Maltese are happy, and very amiably so. Though they fight together like two moles in one tunnel, and distrust one another from the sole of the foot upwards, none the less, in their common possession of that ancient, mysterious, unwriteable tongue, and in their equal habitation of 'Fior del Mondo', they would rather be 'done down' by a brother-Maltese than inherit a fortune from a stranger. Malta, I say, is more than their country, it is their world; Malta is a world apart, broken off, like the moon; and Maltese have been known to sell up good businesses in America, even at a ruinous loss, all for a little loose cash with which to take ship for Zion on the sea.

'Fior del Mondo' to the Maltese, to the stranger in their midst the island is but a flat stone thrown too far into the sea. I speak, not of the tourist, but of the hapless British official marooned, on a wretched stipend, where seventeen miles of yellow monotony is multiplied by twelve of just the same. The cumulative effect is past description. . . . A fish dying by inches on a hot stone is perhaps an apt figure. See the poor creature! . . . First it flops with widely-expanded gills, desperate for the cool passage of water; next it subsides panting, a sad, red-rimmed,

expressionless eye gazing fixedly at nothing. Not otherwise does he feel in Malta, for whom the long, parched summer brings no deliverance. *Strada Reale, paradiso* to the Maltese, to him is *purgatorio*. The yellow rocks of Sliema are like a mess of buttered egg in the sight of a bilious eye. Only in the dark, cavernous recesses of the Union Club can he find appeasement, for there at least he can grouse, grouse, grouse, with others worse than himself.

It is the smallness, it is the sameness, it is the smugness ! For how can the Maltese but look smug when they themselves are happy and at home ? ' *Fior del Mondo* ' . . . They do look smug ! Their language hurts, their festas infuriate ; themselves, smart and stout in white or yellow ducks, become a jaundiced obsession. As when a man is in love he hates the world that is ' fancy-free ', so in Malta does one come to hate the Maltese for their contentment, their enjoyment. Most unfair, most unreasonable ! . . . But there it is. Oh, for space, for height, for trees ! For fresh air, cold winds, and rain !

If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget our first homeward-bound arrival at Modane. It was evening—cloudy, cold, wet ; with great fists of mountain shaken from among clouds. There was the sound of rushing water, the stir of multitudinous trees, home-lights smudging through the drizzle. There was the snort of great continental engines, the long line of lighted coaches, bustle, commotion, the French language, and Paris to come. One must have fried long months in Malta to know the beatitude of all this.

All that is obvious enough : there is, however, a less obvious side to the moral exile of Malta.

Most men are well aware how entirely their best efforts are dependent on an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding ; an audience, for example, may halve or double a speaker's task. On this showing, one could never hope to attain to any sort of best in Malta ; and, losing heart, one began soon to lose flesh. It was indeed a case of piping and nobody's dancing, which is surely the most forlorn of all figures in the Bible. Though one should have spoken with the tongues of men and angels, the English would only have thought one a fool for taking so much trouble, while the Maltese would have regarded the angelic passages with suspicion, as possibly introducing yet another language into their little Babel. It is true, not only on the spiritual plane, that a man can do no wonderful works in an atmosphere of disbelief.

Living cut off from the world and in a sphere of their own, most Maltese have the natural straightforward egotism of children ; their desire is, not to hear concerning impersonal matters, but to speak—about themselves. They cannot bear, like children again, that anyone should remain ignorant of their titles to consideration. The little boy of my acquaintance who announced 'I'se three's old, and a dood boy', exactly expresses the Maltese attitude. Once, when I was waiting in a high state of nerves before delivering a public lecture, there entered unto me two elderly men, who, on the pretext of making my esteemed acquaintance, had come to tell me all about themselves. They stood before me, inimitably naïf, in Dancing Position Number One ; and first one stepped forward and reeled off a long yarn about his public services and their scandalous

lack of recognition, which was no sooner suspended (for sheer lack of breath) than the other took *two* steps forward, and entoned in a solemn voice 'All that you have just heard, Prof'sa, is—TRUE!' In this way, step by step, one off, one on, I was backed all round the room.

The students used sometimes to bring me English compositions of their own, verses and the like, for my criticism; and I, willing to encourage them, would praise the productions. But I soon found that my praise fell far short of what the authors expected and held to be their due; that these things were not to be regarded as attempts, but as achievements. This sort of simplicity opens a wide gulf, and makes friendship impossible.

A Maltese boy once told me he had just returned from England, where he had been with his father. I expressed much interest, asking where he had been, what he had seen, and many other questions. But he seemed put off: had I not, he inquired, read of this visit in the English Press? In Malta, of course, everybody's arrival or departure is chronicled in the local Press, and this boy's father was an island dignitary of great importance, who had been commanded to Buckingham Palace! What more likely, after all, than that I, an Englishman, should have read all about it in the paper? I had to get out of it by saying I had not been reading the papers just recently. Malta, I repeat, is not a little island; it is a big world.

I was once in the Anglo-Egyptian Bank waiting to cash a cheque. A youth beside me, who appeared to have dropped in because the clerk was a friend of his and because he wanted to

cut the pages of some books with a Bank paper-knife, introduced himself to me easily as a possible future student of mine. Only, he said, he did not at all approve of the syllabus, which he proposed to have altered, in conference with his political friends, as soon as he could find time for the matter. He went on to ask me, chattily, whether it was a fact, as he had heard, that I received a full month's salary for June, which month, as it consisted of nothing but examinations, was obviously not whole-time employment ; and, taking my stunned silence for assent, he remarked that the thing was a scandal. This youth, who was quite the most impudent specimen I ever encountered even in Malta, was poured into a very tight suit of white ducks, which displayed a certain part of his person so temptingly, that the toes of my more forcible foot began to throb and ache. If the clerk had not asked me at that moment to step inside, I think there might at length have been a genuine example of a 'poor student'.

Then there were the English to heighten one's sense of exile. I was much disturbed at first in Malta by the advice constantly given by English residents *not to stay too long!* Three years was the time-limit mentioned, and in the event it was three years. Longer would have been fatal to one's self-respect : there is very little vegetation on the island of Malta—except the Englishmen that get stuck there !

Once it was absolutely settled that university affairs must be left to the (possibly) ameliorating hand of time, and that it was wholly beyond my power to effect the smallest change for what I believed to be the better, what remained for me

to do? Even if one could have felt much interest in Maltese politics, the Colonial Office Regulations commanded concealment of it; and if one loved dancing as one might love the hope of heaven, I think a man might still get sick of it in Malta. I saw little of my students out of hours, nothing at all of my colleagues, except the Rector. . . . What to do?

Once, during an interview with a Very Exalted Personage, I got the length of complaining that really there was nothing for me to do, and that the job I had come to fill was a blind-alley. If a man did well in a colony, I pointed out, he had usually the hope, fallacious as it probably was, that his efforts would reach the ears of authority in Downing Street. Disinterested toil and influencing people 'in the right direction' is all very well, but a young man has a certain duty to himself and his family. My attempts, undertaken at the cost of much personal inconvenience, to adjust the standard at the university, had had the sole and inevitable result of raising a storm of public sympathy for 'our poor students', had made English stink in the nostrils of the *studenti*, and had strengthened Italianist propaganda. I could not quite see, I hinted, what had been the point of bringing a young, university man to Malta, there to break his heart and bark his shins over 'cultural affinities' which he could not alter, when some superannuated schoolmaster wishing to end his days in a warm climate would have served the Government's purpose and the needs of the position equally well, if not much better. It is my firm belief that the Very Exalted Personage, while he suffered this 'grouse', fully shared my view, and cursed the day when

application had been made of the Colonial Office that a 'young, university man' be rounded up for Malta.

Probably there had been some rather chuckle-headed idea of organising the *studenti* on 'English lines'. It is a good example of the fatuous idealism of government, which works out so often at somebody's expense. Southern students cannot be organised on 'English lines'—possibly because they are not English; and the only result of bringing them much together in common-rooms and such places would be to increase their opportunities for talking politics. Southern students, in my opinion, should be kept apart as much as possible.

Still, the authorities sought their 'young, university man', and they got him; and, when they had got him, they seemed not to know what to do with him. They realised soon enough, if a little too late, that the idea they had cherished was delusive, and that the *studenti*, backed by public opinion in so far as this became vocal in the Press, had no intention whatever of being organised on 'English lines', which involve a discipline and traditions which are foreign to the island. The authorities therefore assumed that the victim of their delusion would either take himself off out of it, or be content, like the Young Waterman in the *Pickwick* ballad, to 'row along thinking of nothing at all!'

What the authorities did not put to themselves, what indeed authority the world over is notoriously bad at putting to itself, is just that a certain amount of wrong had been done in the meantime, and that a man cannot leave his own country for a term of years without losing touch also.

But colonial teachers, whether they be called schoolmasters or university professors, are the step-children of Imperial service. None of the ordinary kudos of 'empire-builders' attaches to them; no safeguards are afforded them, and no goals are held before their eyes. No Rudyard Kipling has ever sung the Imperial teacher, but the attitude towards them is that of Mr. Squeers towards Nicholas Nickleby. . . . "My dear," said that great thinker to his wife, "the young man is cheap! If he likes to learn the boys anything, what harm does it do the business?" But many 'thinkers imperially' are inclined to go even further, and to take the view of Mrs. Squeers, who objected to Nicholas from the start, as likely to make the boys rebellious. . . . And, in any case, as she finely remarked, "He's dear if you don't want him!"

As for Malta, the educational situation there is far beyond solution by any Englishman. An Englishman cannot even help, for he does not argue from the same premises. Most of the Maltese would speak English no better and no worse if a Maltese taught it them: instead, then, of getting Englishmen out to Malta, why should not the Malta Government send some of its supernumerary young men and women to England, to study the language for teaching purposes at some college? If the Maltese are unwilling to spend money in such a way, then let them do without English for a time, and see how they get on without it. The education problem is their fish now: let them fry it. If they cook themselves in the process, that, after all, is autonomy.

A long string of small 'grouses!' . . . Yes,

but quite enough, taken all together, to form a pretty substantial moral exile.

I wonder what friends, if any, Coleridge made in Malta ? The Maltese of that day were doubtless full of their recent victory over Napoleon's derelict garrison, just as in my day they were full of the new constitution. And the English would be full of themselves—as usual ; and must have thought Coleridge a very queer fish indeed. What did the silly fool come for ? Probably, when the sun baked on the Square and the sweat came through his clothes in patches, when the Governor was irate and the patriots crowing loudly, Coleridge wondered too.

And then Ovid at Tomi ! To whom did Ovid talk, for Ovid was patently a talker ? The Roman centurions were probably taken up with the Tartars and with the chances and hazards of their own military careers ; probably, too, they looked a bit askance at the man who had reddened the Purple. History does not tell us what the inhabitants of Tomi were like, but one feels fairly sure they were not much interested in Ovid's pursuits. Perhaps some of them had 'cultural affinities' with the Tartars, and took it out of the few Roman civilians whose mistake or mischance it was to be where they were !

Who knows ?

CHAPTER XXXI

TRAVELS—WITH AND WITHOUT A BABY

HERE are many inducements to leave Malta, but in our day there were few facilities. One by one the various services had been first curtailed, then suspended, during the war, and it was only by slow and contentious degrees that they were beginning to recover. In 1920, when we went to Malta, even the mails put in an irregular appearance, according as an Admiralty trawler had time to go and fetch them from Syracuse: an arrangement which made us thankful indeed we had got married before I went there! Not long after our arrival, the Government (then British) of Malta purchased this Admiralty trawler for the mail service, and manned it with a local crew.

But the Government (then British) of Malta had larger ideas for its mail service than any mere trawler. It had visions of a real mail-steamer, with funnels! . . . a commodious and comfortable vessel which should revive the 'tourist industry' between Malta and the mainland. Accordingly the Government (then British) of Malta invited 'tenders' from such shipping firms as might feel a vocation to serve the island in this respect.

Now, heaven knows I am no business man, and it may be that the terms offered by the Government (then British) of Malta were reasonable and equitable terms, such as some stable and

respectable shipping company might well be disposed to consider. I say, I know nothing of business. . . . But the terms of the contract to be entered into read to me uncommonly like a rather clumsy sort of booby-trap: the document impressed me as sounding like a *jeu d'esprit* of April First. One would have had, I think, to be *very* fond of Malta before undertaking that contract. Judge, then, of my surprise when an Englishman actually jumped at it, offering to provide for the purpose an ex-cross-channel steamer of handsome appearance.

Before very long this philanthropist duly arrived in Malta, where he was welcomed with the warmth which his disposition seemed to deserve. He looked just the man for the job, 'bluff and breezy' to a fault, and plausible to a degree. This last quality enabled him to borrow money locally to considerable amounts, on the security, it may be presumed, of the fine vessel which could be seen for nothing by anybody who took the trouble to glance at the Grand Harbour. The contract was duly signed, whereby the 'Captain' undertook to forfeit a certain sum of money if he failed to fulfil its provisions: And speaking of provisions reminds me that an inaugural banquet was splendidly served on board, at which the Captain, rather higher than the top of his usual genial form, made a speech lasting so long that men wondered! The vessel then set sail on her maiden-voyage for Syracuse.

All went well for a time, but then letters began to appear in the public Press, calling attention, with less admiration than formerly, to the 'breeziness' and 'bluffness' of Malta's benefactor. His 'breeze' was becoming a gale, his 'bluff'—

but why say more? Soon it became patent to the least expert eye that all was not well: sometimes the ship did not sail, owing to the recalcitrance of the crew, and the mails lapsed into their former state of irregularity. Finally, one day, the vessel sailed off to Syracuse, and . . . never came back!

The Captain had not absconded with her. . . . The Syracusans had absconded with him! In Syracuse, no less than in Malta, he had raised money on the vessel, and the Syracusans, less credulous than their 'affinities' across the water, had been the first to detain her. The Captain, like the Athenians of old, had not been permitted to leave the harbour of Syracuse.

Then arose in Malta a terrible outcry: Melita mourning for her shekels, and refusing to be comforted! It further transpired that the Captain owed large sums for the vessel in England, as well as in Malta and Syracuse. The whole thing had been a kind of *Bourse* jest on his part, and the vessel sold twice over wouldn't reimburse the victims of his plausibility. Besides, the Syracusans had 'got away with the goods!' . . . At that very moment the Captain was bluffly pouring sea-water into the boilers, and breezily holding up several boatloads of Sicilian militia with a revolver.

It is a long and a sad story. Learned Maltese lawyers hurried across to Syracuse (by the trawler!), British consuls hastened from Catania and Messina, the Italian army on the spot was heavily reinforced! . . . But, somehow, the united indignation of all these worthies failed to abash the Captain. He disappears from the narrative, leaving his vessel with rotted boilers for three

sets of creditors to quarrel over. The Maltese long had visions of trying him (for *lèse Maltese!*) and committing him to gaol; but—first catch your Captain, then try him! The Maltese *did* try—not exactly the Captain, for he was not there, but certainly everything else! . . . But without avail.

It is said that the Captain tarried awhile, in great comfort at Taormina, so as to be near the island he had loved so well.

The trawler resumed the mail-service.

It was by this trawler that we made our first crossing to Syracuse on our way home for summer-leave. She had, in those days, no accommodation for passengers, other than the deck; but beggars cannot be choosers, and the only other way of reaching the mainland was to Marseilles, via Tunis, by a yacht-rigged thing with a crank screw, owned and manned by *Russians!* No, thank you! We committed our bodies to the trawler, our souls to the powers that be, hoping for the best.

The night was calm, the breeze was fair, and we fussed out of the Grand Harbour in fine style. There were some pleasant people on board, and we all had tea cheerfully enough on a rickety wooden table just outside the galley-door. Those who had chairs sat on 'em, others squatted on coils of rope. We told one another, under the influence of the tea (supplemented with cognac), that the fourteen hours of passage would soon be over, and ourselves snugly ensconced in *wagons-lits* for Rome. But oh! the loneliness when a moonless dark set in, and only the eery waters washed of that old, old sea.

My wife had a kitchen-chair on which to pass

the night, and I had a life-belt kindly lent by a member of the crew. I can only say that, after a short attempt to use that life-belt as a pillow, I think not even a shipwreck would have induced me to come near it again. In the dim light of a single hanging lamp, all the illumination there was on board, I crouched for hours scouring the recesses of my overcoat ; and, baring an arm to the chill gust, I beheld by the same light the fierce scathe that had been done me. For the rest of the night I tramped the deck, round and round the bridge, almost weeping with the agony which afflicted my neck and arm, and in direst doubt as to whether even now, after searchings innumerable, I was really clean. I was not, as it happened : in the train next morning something came out of my pocket along with my pocket-book, from the extreme latter-end of the pencil-case where it had fled in alarm !

The sea was stormy off Sicily in the morning, and the waves rose up to gnash at us over the rail ; but the trawler showed herself at least sea-worthy, and we made the scene of Athens' downfall in good time. I had wired for a courier —and it was well, for otherwise we should have been torn to pieces in the scrimmage for our custom !—and I commanded this unshaved person to lead us to a hotel. I wanted a bath—oh, how I wanted a bath ! . . . And we all wanted breakfast. But a Syracusan bath is a queer, disappointing experience, and I picked up more fleas in the process of dressing and undressing than I got rid of *creeps* !

The obliging Maltese customs-officer, who had taken us aboard the night before in his launch, had asked me, if I should enjoy the novel crossing

by trawler, to write something about it for the Malta press. "But how," said I, "if I *don't* enjoy it?" for even then I was far from sure that I should. "In *that* case," returned our friend, with the eloquent southern shrug in which the eye-brows play a part, "you will, I am sure, be good enough to write nothing!" I was good enough, I wrote nothing.

When next we left Malta, this time for good, our difficulties were vastly increased by the existence of a ten-months' infant of strong prejudices and passions. As he was our own, and as nobody was to be blamed for him but ourselves, we just had to do the best we could. We dreamed, of course, of an all-sea passage straight to Tilbury—comfortable private cabin, 12,000 tons register; and to this end I everlastingly haunted the dank and detestable premises of shipping-agents on the Marina. But there was nothing doing! A new mail-boat had by now succeeded to the unutterable old trawler, but Etna had lately playfully trickled a little lava over the railway-line beyond Catania, with result that *wagon-lit* could only be booked from Messina—if then! A French liner, by which we provisionally booked to Marseilles, was reported, by one of those extraordinary *canards* which are the only song-birds of Malta, to be infected with plague from Constantinople or the Piraeus; so in the end it was by an Italian steamer, from Tripoli to Naples, that we got off the island.

I shall never forget the look of that ship the evening we embarked upon her, with an infant in arms and two nervous breakdowns, one apiece! There she lay off the bastioned heights of Valletta, with a list on her which made one feel drunk

only to look at from the shore. She was surrounded with dghaisas, of course, and crammed to the rail with miscellaneous Italians, civil and military, including a large number of the then novel 'Black Shirts'. As usual on an Italian ship, nobody could speak a word of either English or French ; and we made our way on board to the strains of a band, which further complicated the business of making ourselves understood. Hundreds of Italian soldiers, returning to Italy from Tripoli, were expressing their very natural feelings of joy by dancing in unbuttoned tunics to the strains of this band ; while the *Fascisti*, each a little Napoleon like their illustrious leader, stared intently at the harbour and forts of Malta, so soon to be their own ! It was sheer pandemonium on board, to which our son began soon to contribute ; and, if the agent had not just then come alongside, in a dghaisa with an enormous Italian tricolour flying, I do not know what we could have done—except join the dance !

That ship, however, was better than she looked, and the weather was perfect all the way to Naples. There were pleasant English people on board, including a director of the Union Castle Line, who frightened us all by saying that if an *English* ship put to sea with a list like that, she would go down ! Italian ships, however, must be different, for, though by the time we berthed in Naples the stairways on one side were perpendicular, nothing happened.

But life with a baby on board a foreign steamer is not bliss. You want so many extras for which you do not know the Italian. Even the mitigation of meal-times is denied the mother of an infant at sea, for, as she cannot well entrust it to the

good intentions of a male steward, her food must be served her on dingy trays in the twilight of a chaotic cabin. *What* trays they were ! A writhing mountain of macaroni, a square-foot of under-done rhinoceros, and an assortment of old, dubious fruits ! For the rest, life is one long devising of temporary distractions for a disgruntled infant. Not even the perfect Bay of Naples, Vesuvius-crowned, as you enter it through the love-in-a-mist of a southern dawn, is yours to enjoy. . . . Baby will certainly want 'changing' just as you pass the best view of Capri !

In an Italian hotel, however, a baby is a positive asset. Not for nothing is Italy a land of Madonnas ! The proprietor beams and pats, the porters hurry with the bambino's 'pieces', the lift-boy kisses him, chambermaids rally in force from far corridors ; in the restaurant a high-chair is forthcoming without request, the waiter smiles delightedly at the accumulating litter on the floor, the other lunchers all exclaim 'Carino !' It is so everywhere in Italy, everywhere in France : a baby is a surer passport to goodwill than any the Foreign Office can issue. In Rome the tradition of the she-wolf that suckled Romulus still gloriously survives that city's many vicissitudes, and in Paris *Notre Dame de Paris* is more than just a name. Not until we arrived in London had we cause to hang our heads and regard our (rather nice) infant as a solecism. There is a certain determined grip on reality about the so-called Latin races which I greatly admire : they know, for example, that babies exist and must exist, and that it is the nature of the poor little morsels to cry and make trouble ; and hence, instead of looking glumly or resentfully

at the parents, they rally round and try to help. I think perhaps they are especially kind to English people who fare abroad at this disadvantage, for I suspect they are surprised and delighted to find us so ordinarily human. Babies, after all, should be a great international bond of union, for, though they can speak no language, they can be understood in all ; their manners and customs are the same in the north as in the south, in the east as in the west ; and they are as willing to be entertained by the guttural chuckles of the German as by the fluting endearments of the Italian.

The Maltese have pretty ways about children, seldom referring to one without adding 'God bless him'. Indeed, nothing on the island is so admirable as the real strength and warmth of family feeling which prevails in all classes, and the natural piety which makes brother helpful of brother, sister watchful of sister, and binds the generations together in kindness and duty. I used often to remind myself, when the *studenti* were more than usually hostile and trying, that probably each one at home was a kind and affectionate elder brother. Families in Malta tend to be enormous, and the numbers add greatly to professional embarrassments ; but the Maltese hold fast to the doctrine, inculcated by the priest, that 'where God sends mouths, He will also send bread'. It is a pity, perhaps, that the clergy which instils this belief—one which comes with a poor grace from celibates—should not add to its numerous accomplishments an elementary knowledge of infant hygiene. The word of the priest would save many an infant life, where that of the doctor is powerless. But

the clergy seems to hold that it doesn't matter much what you put inside the infant mouths that God sends.

We have a letter from Dolores, written at the height of the summer's heat, in which, after remarking that 'babies are dying every day', she adds that her sister's baby is doing well, and 'you may be sure it is all my grumbling at her not to give it anything!' This sounds like a spare diet for an infant. But it simply means that the sister has so far been dissuaded from giving the child a hot-summer diet of coffee, sardines and tomato-macaroni.

Could not the priests do a little similar grumbling? They would grumble fast enough if the children were not brought to be baptised, if the mother neglected to 'church' herself, or any of a family ate flesh-meat on a Friday. Let them preach, besides 'the rational milk of the Word', a rational word of milk only for infants in the first year of life; if it gave them a little extra trouble, they would recoup this outlay elsewhere, for think how many less pathetic little 'white' funerals they would have to conduct!

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MAGIC PEBBLES

WHEN a man goes abroad, because he must, to live and work, he has usually hardly crossed the Channel on his outward journey before he has built a complete Jerusalem on 'England's green and pleasant land'. His mind comes home so often from abroad, but never to a real England; rather to a 'Wood near Athens', which he will find, when he returns in (probably rather done-up) body after a lapse of years, to be but mirage and enchantment. The mind, yearning towards home from abroad, is definitely enchanted; it is not thinking of home, it is thinking of heaven.

A man should put it to himself, when he consents to go abroad to live, that never again in this life can he come back to the country he left. It will not be the same country, because he will not be the same man; something, I cannot say whether for good or ill, will have happened to him, and England, from being an axiom, will have become a problem.

He will find, in spite of himself, that absence and distance are two magic pebbles which have ground themselves into glasses for his eyes, and through these glasses many aspects of his own country will appear to him like the complexions of the Brobdingnagian ladies to Gulliver. He

will behold her fair face as pitted and pocked with the scars of wounds and the holes of disease; her smoky breath will make him cough, and the conditions under which many of her people live will strike him as radically monstrous. What is the use, he will ask himself, of the sun's never setting on a mere extent of empire, if the sun never rises in many streets at home?

The question obtrudes. While we were busy as a nation making our 'far-flung' empire, we forgot about ourselves at home. Our children cried for bread, and we gave them a stone—such stones as Gibraltar and Malta. May it not be more than mere coincidence that empire and industrialism began at about the same time? . . . Once you have got industrialism, you simply must have somewhere whither to escape.

I once said to a very rich man, as we drove together to his sumptuous club, that London struck me after absence from it as a thing which on the whole ought never to have happened. Because it is so bad to be poor in! The emotion was less sharp with my companion (for good reasons), but he agreed that London is a bad place to be poor in; and he added that only one city is worse—New York. But Paris, I said, struck me quite differently; and again he agreed, saying that a very decent life could be lived in Paris on quite moderate means. How is this, one wonders? . . . The richer the city, and the richer the country in which that city is, the worse off the poor are. America is certainly the richest country in the world at the present time, yet, according to my friend, who knows the world well, it is the worst country of all in which to be poor.

The trouble in England at the present time is the same as the trouble in Malta: over-population—not enough jobs to go round. This, in spite of the fact that all the nations of Europe not long since did their industrious best for four years to reduce numbers. The remedy for this state of things is supposed to be expatriation: only, of course, the sort of people we want to expatriate is just the sort that no other country is particularly anxious to receive. None of us wants to expatriate hard workers and good citizens.

In spite of Malta's appalling over-population, I personally used always to feel sad when I heard of schemes for expatriating the peasants. The peasants seem to belong so intimately to the island, and the island ought so certainly to belong to them, since it is they who have transformed it through nameless generations from a barren rock to a fertile country. Malta is the work of peasants' hands; yet, whenever there is any talk of 'surplus' population, it is always the peasants who are held to be that surplus. Well, if Maltese peasant immigrants can do for parts of Australia what they have done for Malta itself, the Australians will have little cause for complaint. I did wish, however, that a few lawyers might emigrate instead—and a boatload or two of 'our poor students'! You never hear anything in Malta about 'our poor peasants'... Yet the peasants love their island quite as much as 'our poor students' do, and they show their love by working hard from morning until night. I used to hate to think of the peasants gazing with their large, simple, trusting eyes at such beauty-spots as Detroit. It would be a sad sight to see a little green Maltese lizard lost on a slag-heap in

South Wales, and the thought of a Maltese peasant in America is sadder still.

The Maltese upon whom emigration has the most beneficial effects are undoubtedly the priests. Such of them as go off to minister to Maltese colonies abroad almost always make good; their slackness in Malta being largely a matter of having far too little to do. Once they get abroad they have to put their backs into things, and present an edifying front to other religious denominations. I am no worshipper of the fetish of competition in trade, but religious competition is sometimes a thing with splendid results: English Roman Catholicism, for example, which is said to be the best in the world, owes almost everything to its numerical inferiority in England, to its perpetual obligation of making even better than just good, and to its inherited experience of the penal laws. If 'Our Lady' were ever moved to hear the post-Benediction prayers addressed to her for the wholesale conversion of her 'Dowry', English Roman Catholicism would probably soon lapse into something very average. It is a curious paradox, and not now pointed out for the first time, that the religion of peace seems always at its best when its existence is unremitting warfare.

The above considerations may well raise the interesting theological point of whether so-called 'heresiarchs' are not, more truly, apostles in disguise? Luther, for instance, reformed the church he had left; and perhaps his greatest triumph is, not the Lutheran body of Germany and Scandinavia, but the Roman Catholic Church in England to-day. Ought not his name to be included in the Litany of Saints, with the petition

—‘Holy Luther, exasperate us! . . . All ye holy heretics and schismatics, stir us from our sloth!’

An English cardinal, however, maintained in a recent Pastoral Letter to the Faithful that Luther is responsible for England’s being a bad country to be poor in. Industrialism, according to this cardinal (who I think must have been reading Cobbett), is a result of the Reformation. But for the Reformation we should still be in what Coventry Patmore calls ‘the mythic time, of England’s prime’. I imagine this ‘mythic time’ must have been something like modern Malta; for, when the same cardinal visits that island, he is loud in his praise of its religious condition. Well, well! . . . It is good to know, on authority, what is really the matter with England, for there is enough wrong, assuredly, to make a returning Englishman feel sad.

But in so far as the magic pebbles of absence and distance have revealed anything to me, they have revealed this: that we English are a very curious, quixotic people. Our Empire—of which we are inordinately proud whenever we think of it, which is seldom—exists, not to do Englishmen any good, but to tread on them. Our money goes abroad in doles and subsidies, our taxes stay at home, getting every day and in every way bigger and bigger. We are generous and kind to all but ourselves; suave and yielding to all but one another. We flatter and cajole the people who don’t care for our culture, and turn the cold shoulder on those that do. If we sequestrate a nuisance anywhere, it is only to release him again, almost with apologies; and if a general acts with promptitude and firmness to save our women and children, we disgrace

him from Downing Street—where, of course, the emergency is less acute. We extend our toleration to everything—even to institutions whereof an integral tenet is intolerance. We make our own fair country hideous, that others may be fair; we groan in slavery that others may be free. We pay our debts, capital and interest; but recoil from the idea of being paid back in turn. Our bosom is lean with nursing, yet we permit leech after leech to suck our blood. Verily, we are the Don Quixotes of the world—leaving our own home to rot, while we right the wrongs of an ungrateful world.

Yet, after all, charity begins at home. . . . And what of the home where it begins? England, that persecuted saint, that patient milch-cow of Empire, is in her own home a Mrs. Jellyby, dictating a thousand letters about Boriaboola-Gha, while her own children fall down areas and cry.

CHAPTER XXXIII

'LET US ALONE!'

A HIGH Personage once said to me, in a moment of expansion, that in his opinion England had neglected Malta. We might, he thought, have done much for Malta if we had cared, but we had not cared. We had held our imperial rights, and neglected our humane duties. Now the Maltese were what we had left them to be, and their failures must be reckoned as our failures too.

Now, whoever else may be accused of neglecting Malta, the High Personage in question is not one of them ; he has been positively grandfatherly in his attitude towards Malta. But personally I do not at all agree with him. Our policy, in so far as it has been policy and not just drift, has been to let the Maltese go their own way and mould their institutions to the national genius ; and, since we should certainly have been called tyrants if we had interfered, I do not see why we should accuse ourselves of unjust stewardship for standing aside. We could only have tried to northernise them, and they will not northernise, except in isolated cases. Why should they ? . . . They are a southern people. They might, no doubt, have been dragooned, as Napoleon would have dragooned them ; but a people which has survived so many dominations is not going to be much modified by the 'peaceful

penetration' of the English. We have not neglected the Maltese ; rather, we have pampered them. We have forced upon them nothing but just as much of our culture and hygiene as was necessary for the health and well-being of our garrison.

You cannot be said to have 'neglected' a thing which never would let you look after it. I feel not the smallest compunction because my cat will stay out all night. Nor do I torment myself with self-criticism when I reflect that nothing at Malta University is any different for my having been on its staff : if the Maltese would have let me, I would have made such changes as seemed indicated ; but they would not let me : as soon as I tried, they became 'stricken deers' and died at me in all sorts of contortions. They preferred things as they were, and I realised this at last. But I am not going to lie awake now thinking how little I did for Malta. . . . *Pas si bête !*

I put it straight to the Maltese that they are, and always have been, extraordinarily well off under British rule. I will submit to them a few random instances of our delicate consideration for their feelings, in small matters as in great ; and I ask them to ask themselves where else in the world they could hope for as much. I do not know how the Romans treated them, how the Carthaginians, or how the Arabs, Normans and Knights ; but I do know that, ever since Great Britain took over by the 'Amor Melitensium' and the 'Vox Europæ', Malta has been governed for the benefit of the Maltese, often to the prejudice of Britain.

Here are my random instances.

The Maltese say they have a 'cultural affinity' with Italy and a preference for the Italian language. We admit the first, and respect the second. A highly-placed British Official, in my time, actually learnt Italian in order not to grate on the Italophile ear! Napoleon would have given the Italophile ear a sound French box, just as the Fascist Italians are doing to the Germanophile ear in the Tyrol.

The Maltese, again, are Roman Catholics. We are mostly Protestants; but what do we do when the Papal Legate comes ashore at Malta, but send out our gunboats, at considerable expense to the British taxpayer, to escort this personage into the harbour! And a very proper and politic act of politeness, no doubt; only—how many nations would do it?

Malta, during a recent Near Eastern crisis, feels the absence of our battleships from her harbours. What do we do but detach a unit for service in Maltese waters, so that this grievance may be lessened! And that, I contend, is what no other nation in the world would have done.

Again, the Maltese resent a satirical entry in a suggestion-book, an exaggerated letter published far away in an English provincial newspaper. British high authority at once takes the matter up, chastises the delinquent, and sends him off the island.

Once more, the British garrison in Malta long ago sets up a library for its own use, calls it the 'Garrison' Library, and so on. The Maltese claim a right to membership; the garrison concedes it. Soon Maltese are on the committee; soon they are in a majority. Somebody asserts that in Italolinguaphile Malta there should be an

Italian section to the library. . . Which is at once provided ! Et cetera, et cetera !

Good lord, what *haven't* we done for the Maltese ! But the only thing which is remembered is the perennial grievance of our refusal to admit Maltese to the Union Club !

A friend of mine once said to me, after sending his boys to one of these new-fangled preparatory schools, all plunge and vapour baths, hanging baskets of flowers, and dimity bedspreads—what a scaly old Jesuit of my acquaintance called a 'mother-trap'—"Good Lord!" said my friend, aghast ; "the boys will never want to come home after this hydropathic!"

Just so with the Maltese : they had been so spoilt under British rule that many of them positively did not want self-government, which, as the Colonial Office reminded them in the covering letter to the draft constitution, would mean that in future they would have nobody to blame for what went wrong but—themselves. I do not wonder many of the Maltese felt like this : Moses would indeed have had a job to persuade the Israelites to follow him, if, instead of giving them stripes and hard labour, the Egyptians had treated them as England treats her subject peoples. Blows, quota ! . . . We are not even allowed to hurt their feelings.

I cannot at all agree that England has neglected Malta during the hundred odd years of association ; on the contrary, I think we have looked after the island not wisely but too well. Let the Maltese who resent the tolerant, if rather lordly and superior attitude of the English, only have over on trial some such little Sicilian jack-in-office as once bullied me about passports in

Syracuse. The passports were in order all right, but he had to spit a good many times before he could feel sure about it, and his scowl was black enough to brush boots with. A few of his sort in Malta would soon liven things up. And those wide Italian military breeches, so conspicuous a feature of Italian streets to-day, have a certain swagger about them which bodes ill for such little countries as may come to be sat on by the wearers.

Personally, I applaud the grant of self-government to Malta from my heart. I think it will do them all the good in the world. Though it may well be asked, and has been asked often both by Maltese and English, how is so small a people, so suspicious of one another, living at such terribly close quarters, so widely illiterate, so credulous and priest-ridden, so supine in some respects, so over-active in others, to govern itself within any reasonable meaning of the word, still I am quite sure the Maltese can do it, and that they ought to be made to do it. Look at the Maltese tram-lines between Porta Reale and Hamrun : they are very queerly laid. In places they give beneath the weight of the tram, often the rivets yield, sometimes the winter mud covers them ; but . . . the Malta tram runs safely over them. It is not a heavy tram, and it is not in a hurry. The Maltese driver soon gets to know the groggy bits of rail, and goes cautiously over them. Herein is a parable of Malta self-government.

The Maltese will run themselves just as they run their trams, with entire satisfaction to nine-tenths of the people. Their methods would not suit us, but they will suit the Maltese. I, for

instance, did not at all care for the statutes of the university, but the Maltese revel in them to law-suits innumerable. The Maltese like law-suits, and look favourably upon whatever is likely to lead to them. We think the violence of their politics shows their incapacity for self-government, but it does nothing of the sort; the Maltese like violent politics. Why do the priests encourage firework displays on Festas? . . . Simply because the people like firework displays. Far from their being unable to run Malta successfully, the Maltese are the only people who *could* run Malta with any real hope of success.

But the constitution which might do for Canada or Australia will not do for Malta, and the vehicle of government designed for them by the Wise Men of the Colonial Office will take a little adjusting before it becomes genuinely and congenially Maltese. The vehicle, as originally provided, was on the lines of a motor-cycle and side-car: not the vehicle for an ancient people. But in a few years, if they stick at it, they will have transformed this contrivance into a very good imitation of the Maltese carozzi, which is just the thing for the narrow winding streets of the villages, with their goats, heedless children, pedlars' carts, and swarms of old women in faldettas. They will have eased off there, and drawn in here, until little by little the vehicle has become fit for the Malta roads, with their sudden sharp hills. There are four passengers to a carozzi, four parties to the Maltese State.

A man on a motor-cycle looks very foolish when a long, straggling religious procession debouches from a church and holds him up for three-quarters of an hour. But a carozzi, in the

same circumstances, looks like part of the procession.

Oh, the Maltese can govern themselves all right, give them but time to get going ; and the pressure of hard facts will, I believe, bring about a solution someday of even the dear old 'language' question itself.

I have more than once throughout this book expressed my genuine sympathy with the Italophile Maltese, whom I can by no means blame for finding British 'Service' culture puzzling and unattractive. I myself find it puzzling and unattractive. But in the main I think that such hankering after Italy as exists here and there in Malta is due, not to culture at all, but to the natural laziness induced by centuries of Sirocco. I felt it myself when I was in Malta, so that the strenuous trivialities of the English newspapers used to disgust me. Across the narrow straits, the Maltese feel, is a Lotus Land whereof the waters are all unstirred by the sharp prows of ships of war, where cabbages (doubtless) are still watered each singly from an old kerosene tin as Moses may have watered them from an earthen pot, and where, at the hour of noon, the sleep of the South falls softly, unrebuked. There is a Lotus-eating element in the Maltese character. . . .

'Let us alone !'

But England is Odysseus, and ever exhorts them to 'climb the climbing wave !' Why climb what must ever climb with us ? What godless doctrine is this ? Have they perhaps an inkling—these tired priests and poor students—that Italy would 'let them alone ?' Why should they toe our artificial line, who were old already when we were not yet born ? What is this British

Empire, with its idol of efficiency, its fetish of the fixed price, the straight line ? 'Thou shalt make unto thyself no false gods !' . . . Our sort of efficiency is a false god to the Maltese, and we are worshippers of a brazen image. The fixed price is not the way of their fathers, the straight line less lovely than the languorous curve. Have they a yearning across the straits because there, too, the Lotus is eaten, there, too, the old path followed which goeth by curves to the goal that is but its own beginning again ?

" Let us alone. What is it that will last ?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil ? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave ?
All things have rest, and ripen towards the
grave
In silence ; ripen, fall, and cease :
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or
dreamful ease ! "

By a coincidence I read that poem with my students, and—they liked it. They liked it (poor dears) as much as they ever liked anything which might figure in an examination-paper and hold them, haply, from their fiercely-cherished career. But I, as I looked along the rows of southern faces, deriving from a mysterious 'pre-past'—I, in my curious pulpit, under a picture of the Crucifixion—thought to myself, " You, you are Lotus-eaters ! It is your own inmost feelings that are here expressed ! "

Was I not right ?

" What pleasure can we have
To war with evil ? "

Does the Maltese cleric, tired and good-natured, explain there his endless acquiescence in things as they are ?

" Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave ? "

There, surely, speaks the ' poor student ', who would so much rather stroll Reale, sweetly conversing, in the sun and in the shade !

" All things have rest. . . . "

So say, in effect, the prone forms of Maltese workmen stretched along the kerb or on some stone wall, at the noon hour of siesta.

" Ripen, fall and cease ! "

It is the history of the peasant-woman, with her brief maidenhood, her ' sacramental ' marriage, the coming and going of her too, too many children, her long, long age.

It is the very voice of the South ! . . . The South of the much Sirocco ! . . . The South of the burning sun !

CHAPTER XXXIV

WONDERLAND AND THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

WHILE I have been writing these pages, many, many queer occasions have passed in review before the mind's eye, and I have enjoyed them in retrospect as I never did at the time. When Alice returned from Wonderland, she told her story while it was fresh to her sister; and the sister, listening, could almost fancy that she, too, saw the White Rabbit, the Duchess, the Gryphon, and all the rest. I wish it might be so with readers of this narrative.

There are Wonderlands in plenty on the face of this earth, but one must enter them, as Alice did and I, by falling through a hole. The hole through which I fell into the Wonderland of Malta was a hole in my own pocket.

Yes, I have lived in Wonderland. I have been present at the Mad Tea Party, and watched the Hatter and the March Hare cramming the Dormouse head-first into the teapot. I have been obliged to play croquet with flamingoes and hedgehogs, and stand by while King and Queen argued hotly with the Executioner as to whether a head without a body could be beheaded. I have been in the 'Soup, Soup, beautiful Soup,' and had my toes trodden on by the Gryphon and Mock Turtle solemnly dancing.

Likewise, I have been through the Looking-glass, a realm which is entered quite easily via any Government Department in Whitehall. Haigha, the Anglo-Saxon messenger, meets you on the very doostep, and Humpty-Dumpty sits in every room. One soon learns the ropes: if you want to get anywhere, always walk in the opposite direction, speak French if you can't remember the English, and curtsey while thinking what to say. You must run very fast to stay in the same place, and accept the driest of dry biscuits to quench your thirst. You must appear to agree with the Red Queen when she tells you that she has seen hills compared to which the one under discussion is a valley, and you must grasp the essential fact that you really *are* only a part of somebody else's dream. Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee are forever arming for that great battle of theirs, the Walrus and the Carpenter invite the oysters to come for a walk. You must learn not to betray surprise when the White Queen turns into an old sheep before your eyes, and you must get used to the fundamental principle of 'jam yesterday and jam to-morrow, but *never* jam to-day'.

One soon picks up Looking-glass ways.

Only the smile of the Cheshire Cat will help you much in Wonderland. You will first lose your temper altogether, and then discover one you never knew you had. "I wish," said Alice, "the creatures wouldn't all argue so!" . . . And that is the wish of all who visit Wonderlands. But they will, all the same.

As for the Looking-glass world, the whole truth about *that* was succinctly put by the Man dressed in Newspaper, who told Alice on her railway-

journey to take a return-ticket every time the train stopped.

We English are apt to take ourselves very seriously and to be easily put out ; I think perhaps a term in Wonderland would do us all good. If you take things too seriously there, you only undergo total immersion in a bath of tears. The flamingo *will* turn round and look you wistfully in the face ; the hedgehog *will* unroll and go off on its own ; the hoops never stay in position. None of them is trying to play croquet. . . . They are in Wonderland ! I think a game of croquet under Wonderland conditions would be good for us all. As for myself, like M. Coué, I invented a number of little golden formulas which I cooed over to myself in bed at night. . . . 'What does it Malta ? ' I demanded of myself. 'As if it Malta'd ! '—'No Malta ! '—'What can be the Malta ? ' These little tags were a great help to me when I was too small to get the key off the table, or too large to get out of the door.

And if we English take ourselves too seriously, how much more seriously do we take those things which we think are greater than ourselves ! Our politics, for example—our universities, our religion or lack of it ; we are too solemn about these things, and get but little enjoyment out of them. In Wonderland everybody has a bit of the magic mushroom, whereby he can increase or decrease at will.

Once or twice, while I was in Malta, that excellent English Roman Catholic newspaper, the *Universe*, was sent out to me, and I read it from cover to cover, not I hope with cynicism, but certainly with the broad smile of the Cheshire Cat. You see, I was living in Wonderland, where

everything which the *Universe* most desiderates for England actually exists. Is it a mere accident, I wonder, that this ably-edited and interesting paper is called the *Universe*? Not the *World*, or *Christendom*, but the *Universe*. Well, we are all apt to be affected by our names, and the leading-articles of the *Universe* have an absolute quality which I greatly envy and admire. The occasional tartness in them is due to the natural impatience of the *Universe* with what Mr. Pecksniff called 'my wormy relatives'. To read this paper is like listening to a smith shoeing horses. . . . Clang, clang, clang! and on to every hoof goes an infallible Roman Catholic shoe, warranted to wear for ever! To the dweller in Wonderland it all sounded very wonderful.

Then our English politics, how heavily we take them! I used to peruse the political leaders with feelings of real awe, but the writers had obviously mislaid the bit off the *small* side of the mushroom. We could never have first our Prime Minister in the dock for criminally libelling the Leader of the Opposition, and then the Leader of the Opposition for criminally libelling the Prime Minister. In Wonderland one really gets some fun out of politics.

Our University Professors, how ponderous they are! None of them was ever casually asked in a Bank by an unmatriculated student for particulars about his salary. Yet in Wonderland, I assure you, it happens quite naturally. . . . Alice soon got used to being lectured by a caterpillar:

Then our Mad Hatters are not mad enough, and, as a people, we have acquiesced far too tamely in our genealogy. Tom, Dick, or Harry

may know what an Englishman is. True, some people maintain that we are the Lost Tribes of Israel (and we look it in high places here and there), while other some are periodically delivered of huge tomes proving by anagrams and crossword puzzles that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. All this is excellent. But our Hatters do not receive the support and encouragement they deserve: our sluggish millions will not take sides.

In Wonderland the 'Lost Tribes' theory would go far to cause a riot, and there could not be less than a General Election over Shakespeare *v.* Bacon. And that somehow reminds me that the formation of the island of Malta is said to resemble a giant mushroom; it stands on a colossal stem which is rooted in the bed of the sea! I think there is food for thought in this.

Poor old England, she is believed to be the mother of a hard, practical race, whereas the truth is she is a genetrix of dreamers and a nourisher of visions. Lewis Carroll was thought to be a hard, practical, mathematical don of Christ Church, Oxford . . . but he had his Wonderland, and that was far more the flower of his soul than any equation. England has had many Wonderlands: Ireland was the favourite when I was a boy. We used all to worry frightfully over the wrongs of this tedious people, and constantly decried ourselves in order to glorify them. We rejoiced in attributing to the Irish all those qualities, such as poetry and humour, which are more especially characteristic of England; and it used to be quite seriously urged, Why should this romantic, delightful, poetic people cumber itself with the dry details of administration? . . . Let dull, stupid old England

govern, since it is all she is fit for, while adorable Ireland makes its 'bulls', eats its potatoes, kills its 'da', 'keens' deliciously about Deirdre of the Sorrows against purply-greeny backgrounds, erects statues to generals that never lived, and 'arises and goes now and goes to Inisfree'—in the 'bee-loud glade'. But Ireland arose and went now and went for us with a revolver, and there was a fearful uproar in the 'bee-loud glade'. Singe and Yeats and George Birmingham had been deceiving England! However, good came of it, for the bonnet of the English Celtophiles has been less 'bee-loud' ever since. But it was with hurt feelings that England awoke from her dream of Emerald Erin to the coarse realities of Irish Stew.

And here, in parenthesis, I cannot refrain from perpetuating, as far as words of mine can do any such thing, a delightful incident which associates the subject of Ireland with the main theme of this book. When the Irish Free State was constituted, about a year, if I remember, after the grant of self-government to Malta, the Malta government, wishing to salute this latest addition to the 'great family of free British nations', addressed a congratulatory telegram to the 'Dail'. It was a very proper act of politeness, no doubt, but one feels that the Malta government showed an almost excessive consideration for the susceptibilities of the 'Dail' when it couched its good wishes in—Italian. In the language of Dante, however, the telegram was sent; and a reply was soon received from the 'Dail'—in the tongue of Cuchullin! The 'Dail', in fact, responded to the Italian compliments of Malta with sentiments the most distinguished *in Erse*. Malta was inexpress-

ibly gratified — but likewise a little embarrassed, for nobody in Malta could read Erse ; so that there remains some doubt to this day as to precisely what the 'Dail' said. There was even a feeling in certain circles that the 'Dail', with a levity most unbecoming in a junior, had been pulling a 'great free nation's leg'. But Freedom is above such freedom, Liberty above liberties.

Ireland, then, as a Wonderland was a 'wash-out'. But I, when I cast my thoughts back into the Wonderland whence I am come, have no bitter memories—any more than Alice had when she awoke. I only wish I could have fitted more harmoniously into the *scheme* of things, and enjoyed the 'Caucus Race' without the preliminary bath of tears. I hate Celtic Twilights, but I love Mad Tea-parties. Deirdre of the Sorrows is a fraud—and a spoony one at that ; but the Dodo is a fine bird, the Gryphon a glorious monster. Distance lending enchantment to the view, I feel, as I draw to a close, a great tenderness, not only for the Wonderland I fell into through my own pocket, but even, too, for that Looking-glass World which we have always with us, where walking straight forward only gets one backwards, and one must curtsey humbly while being lectured by a pawn.

I feel a bit as if I had been Alice with the long neck, prying into nests which were never meant for me. If the Maltese Pigeon calls me 'Serpent' and flaps its wings in my face, I shall not be in the least either surprised or offended.